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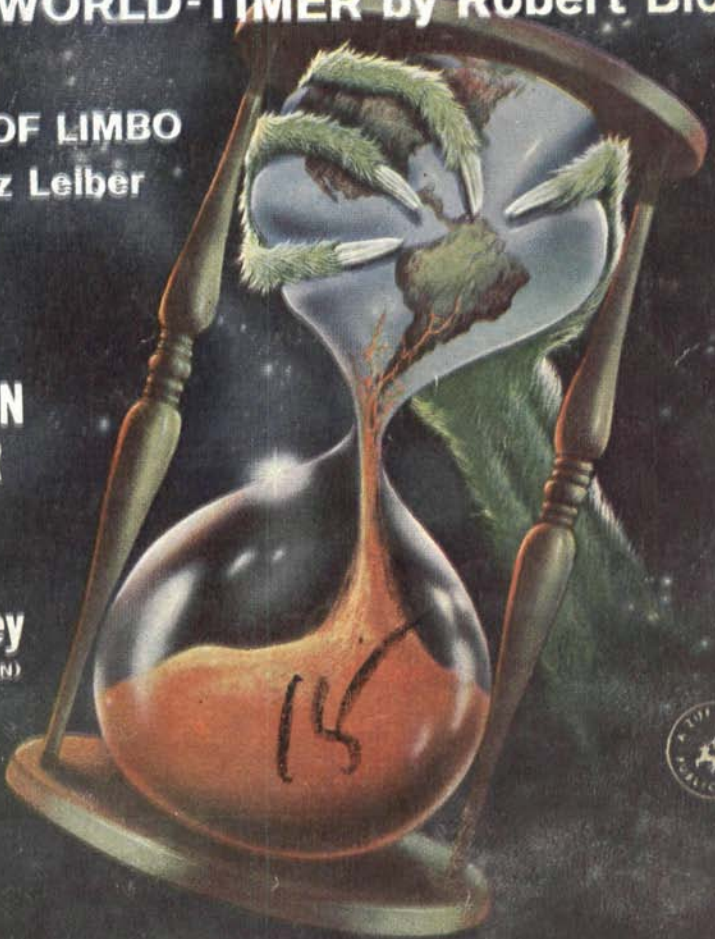

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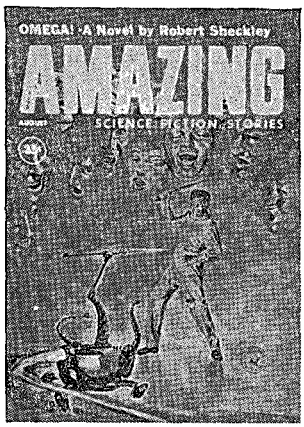

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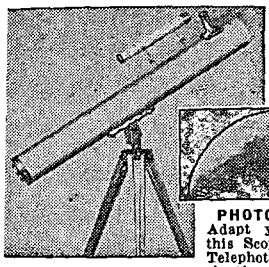

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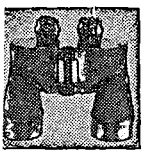

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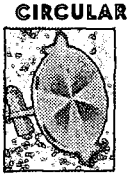

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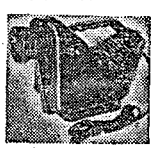

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AUGUST 1960

Volume 9 Number 8

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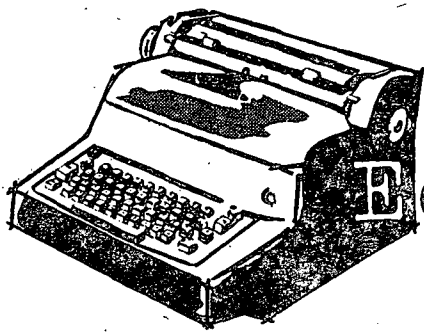

Editorial

IN THIS issue's cover story ("The World-Timer," by Bob Bloch) there is a good deal of talk about what's wrong with this world.

This raises a point that has interested me for some time now. Very few people any longer have the courage of their Utopias. Recently someone asked me how and where I would live if I didn't have to worry about anything but my own dreams.

I told him. I'd like to have a yacht, complete with crew who could staff, run and maintain it. In this yacht there would be rooms lined with all the books I've never had a chance to read, all the music I've never had time to hear, all the art I'd like to enjoy. There would be a swimming pool. There would be four or five guys I could summon when I felt like playing poker. When I didn't feel like playing poker these guys would go back in the woodwork, never to be seen or heard again—until the next poker game. There would also be a one-hole pitch and putt golf course (big yacht, you see, which is OK for daydreams). This yacht would cruise on the high seas, out of sight of land, until I needed new books, music, art, or poker players.

My friend was amazed. Not at my ideas, but at the fact that I *had* them at all. *He* had no ideas at all. Give *him* a chance to do exactly as he wanted and he would be sorely troubled.

Our conversation convinced me that most people no longer dream dreams. This, I think, is one of the saddest things that can be said about our current civilization. Are its pressures so great, its fears so all-encompassing, its drivel so overwhelming that we no longer have a retreat snugly waiting in the secret places of the mind? If so, it is a terrible tragedy. And I am darned glad that the Utopias I daydreamed for myself in my youth are still racketing around somewhere in the back of my cerebrum.

I would be interested to know if most of *you* have personal Utopias. And if so, what they are.—NL

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THE WORLD-TIMER

By ROBERT BLOCH

ILLUSTRATOR BERNKLAU

Definition of a time capsule: you put things into it for posterity to find. Definition of a Time Capsule: you put it in you, and find yourself. Dr. Morton Placebo was not at all sure he liked the idea.

HE MAY or may not have been human.

It was hard to tell, because in a psychiatrist's office, you get all kinds.

But he *looked* human—that is to say he had two arms, two legs, one head, and a slightly

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worried expression—and there was no reason for the receptionist to turn him away.

Particularly since he was here to give free samples.

"I'm from the Ace Manufacturing Company," he told the girl. "An old established firm. You've heard of us?"

The receptionist, who dealt with an average of ten salesmen a day, nodded politely and proceeded to file her nails.

"As the name indicates, we used to be a specialty house," the salesman continued. "Manufactured all the aces used in decks of playing cards. But lately we've branched out into pharmaceuticals."

"How nice for you," said the receptionist, wondering what he was talking about, but not very much.

"Not ordinary products, of course. We have the feeling that most pharmaceuticals are a drug on the market. So we've come up with something different. As our literature indicates, it's more along the lines of the lysergic acid derivatives. In addition to the usual tranquilizing effect, it alters the time-sense, both subjectively and objectively. Mind you, I said 'objectively'. I'm sure your employer will be interested in this aspect, which is to say the least, highly revolutionary—"

"I doubt it. He's always voted Republican."

"But if I could just discuss the matter with him for a few moments—"

The girl shrugged and cocked her head towards the inner sanctum of Morton Placebo, M.D.

"Nobody rides that couch without a ticket," she told him. "The standard fee is $50 an hour, first-class, or $30, tourist. That's with three on the couch at the same time. He says it's group-therapy, and I say it's damned uncomfortable."

"But I'm not a patient," the stranger persisted. "I merely want to discuss my pharmaceuticals."

"You can't discuss your hemmorhoids without paying the fee," the receptionist drawled. "Doctor isn't in business for your health, you know."

The salesman sighed. "I'll just have to leave a few samples and some literature, I guess. Maybe he'll look it over and see me when I call back later. I'm sure he's going to be interested, because these little preparations will alter the entire concept and structure of psychotherapy."

"Then he won't be," the girl decided. "Dr. Placebo likes psychiatry just the way it is right now. Which is to say, at $50 an hour."

"But he will take the free samples?" the salesman persisted.

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"Of course. He'll take anything that doesn't cost money. In fact, he told me it was the free-fantasy which attracted him to the profession in the first place."

She reached out her hand and the representative of the Ace Manufacturing Company placed a little packet of three tablets on her palm.

"The literature is inside," he said. "Please ask the Doctor to study it carefully before he experiments with the dosage. I'll stop by again next week."

"Don't you want to leave your card?" asked the girl, politely.

"Of course. Here you are."

He handed it to her, turned on his heel, and made his exit.

The receptionist studied the card curiously.

It was the Ace of Spades.

Normally, Dr. Morton Placebo wouldn't have paid much attention to a salesman's sample; largely because the very idea of paying was anathema to him.

But, as psychiatrists are so fond of saying—and, quite frequently, demonstrating—the norm is an abstraction.

And Dr. Placebo was always interested in anything which came to him wtihout charge. Perhaps his receptionist hadn't been far wrong when she'd analyzed his reasons for entering a psychiatric career. All psychotherapists have their quirks.

According to his eminent disciple and official biographer, Ernest Jones, the great Sigmund Freud believed in occultism, telepathy, and the magic of numbers. The esteemed Otto Rank developed a manic-depressive psychosis; Wilhelm Reich's rationality was impugned on occasion; Sandor Ferenczi suffered from unbalance due to organic brain-damage.

Compared to these gentlemen, Dr. Placebo's problem was a minor one; he was a frustrated experimenter. Both his frustration and his stinginess had their origin in his childhood, within the confines of the familial constellation.

In plain English, his father was stingier than he was, and when the young Morton Placebo evinced an interest in laboratory experimentation, the old man refused to put up the money for a chemistry set. Once, during his high school years, the young man managed to acquire two guinea-pigs, which promptly disappeared. He was unable to solve the mystery—any more than he could solve the fact that his father, who always carried peanut-butter sandwiches in his lunch-pail, went to work during the following week with meat sandwiches.

But now, at fifty, Morton Placebo, M.D., was fulfilled. He had his own laboratory at last,

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in the form of his psychiatric practice, and no end of wonderful guinea-pigs. Best of all, the guinea-pigs paid large sums of money for the privilege of lending themselves to his experiments. Outside of his receptionist's salary, and the $25 he spent having the couch resprung after a fat woman patient had successfully re-enacted a birth-fantasy, Dr. Placebo had no overhead at all. With the steady stream of salesmen and their free samples, there was no end to the types of experimentation he could indulge in.

He'd used pills which produced euphoria, pills which produced depression, pills which caused a simulation of schizophrenia, pills which had remarkable side-effects, pills which tranquilized, pills which stimulated; pills which resulted in such fascinating manifestations as satyriasis, virilescence and the sudden eruption of motor reflexes in the *abductor minimi digit*. He kept copious notes on the reactions afforded by LSC, *peyotl* extracts, cantharadin, yohimbine and reserpine derivatives. Whenever he found himself with a patient on his hands (or couch) who did not respond to orthodox (or reformed) therapy, Dr. Placebo—purely in the interest of science, of course—reached into his drawer and hauled out a handful of free pills.

Thus it was that he was grateful when he received the samples from the Ace Manufacturing Company.

"The literature's on the inside," his girl told him. He nodded thoughtfully and stared at the glassine packet with its three yellow pills.

"*Time Capsules*" he read, aloud.

"Alters the time sense, both subjectively and objectively," the receptionist said, parroting what she remembered from the salesman's pitch.

"Subjectively," snapped Dr. Placebo. "Can't alter it objectively. Time is money, you know."

"But he said—"

"Never mind, I'll read the literature." Dr. Placebo dismissed her and thoughtfully opened the packet. A small wadded-up piece of paper fluttered out onto the desk. He picked it up, unfolded it, and stared at the message.

"Nstrctns
Nclsd smpls fr prfssnl s
nly. ch s cpbl f prdcng tmprl
dslctn prmnntly nd trnsltng
sr nt nthr cntnm r tm vctr."

There was more to it, much more, but Dr. Placebo didn't bother attempting to translate. Apparently this literature was written in the same foreign tongue used by general medical

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practitioners when they scrawl their prescriptions. He'd better wait and get an explanation from his friendly neighborhood drug-store.

He gazed at the samples once again. *Time Capsules.* Catchy name for a pharmaceutical product. But why didn't the Ace Manufacturing Company print its literature in English? He scanned the last line of the literature. *"Dnt gt yr vwls n n prr."*

Made no sense. No sense at all.

But then, neither did most of his patients. So perhaps the pills would do some good. He'd have to wait for a likely subject.

The likely subject arrived at 3 p.m. Her name was Cookie Jarr, which was probably a polite euphemism for "sexpot." But what's in a name?

Sexpot or Jarr, Cookie was obviously quite a dish. She sprawled, in obvious *deshabillé,* on the couch, and like the professional stripper she was, proceeded to bare her *psyche.*

After a dozen or so previous sessions, Dr. Placebo had succeeded in teaching her the technique of free association, and now she obediently launched into a form of *monologhorrea.*

"I had a dream under very peculiar circumstances the other night . . . I was sleeping alone . . . and in it I was a geek . . ."

"One moment, please," murmured Dr. Placebo, softly. "You say you were a geek? One of those carnival performers who bites the heads off of chickens?"

Cookie shook her auburn locks impatiently. "Not chickens," she explained. "I was very rich in this dream, and I was geeking a peacock." She frowned. "In fact, I was so rich I was Marie Antoinette. And they dragged me out for execution, and I looked at the executioner and said, 'Dr. Guillotine, I presume?' and he said, 'Please, no names—you must be the soul of indiscretion.' So then I woke up and it was four in the morning and I looked out of the window at this big neon sign that says OK USED CARS. You know something, Doc? I'd never buy an OK USED CAR. And I'd never eat at a place that says EAT. Or one that says FINE FOOD. And I'd never be buried in a funeral parlor approved by Duncan Hines. Do you think I'm superstitious? They say it's bad luck to walk under a black cat."

"Perhaps," said Dr. Placebo, sagely. "And then again, perhaps not. We must learn to relate, to adjust. Life is just a bowl of theories." He gazed at her piercingly. "The dream sequence is merely symbolism. Out with it now—face the truth. Why did you really wake up at four in the morning?"

"Because I had to go to the

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bathroom," Cookie snapped. "No, really, Doc, I'll level with you. It's the love bit. That damn' Max keeps getting me down, because he's so jealous of Harry, only that's ridiculous because I don't like Harry at all, it's really Fred, on account of he reminds me of Jerry, the guy I'm crazy about. Or almost as crazy about as Ray." She paused, biting her lip. "Oh, I hate men!" she said.

"Ummm-hmmmm," said Dr. Placebo, doodling on a scratch-pad with which he was ostensibly taking notes but actually drawing phallic symbols which looked suspiciously like dollar-signs.

"Is that all you got to say?" demanded Cookie, sitting up. "Fifty bucks an hour I'm paying, and for what? My nerves are killing me. You got any happy pills, Doc?"

"Happy pills?"

"Tranquilizers, or like whatever. Remember that stuff you gave me last month?"

"Oh, the cantharides."

"Yeah." Cookie smiled happily. "That was the greatest!"

Dr. Placebo frowned; his memories did not coincide with Cookie's, particularly when he recalled the frantic aftermath of that episode when he had to drag her bodily from the ninth floor of the local YMCA. But the experimental urge was strong. Few men could look at Cookie without feeling the urge to experiment.

"Well, there's something new," he said, cautiously.

"Give."

"It's called a Time Capsule. Alters the subjective time-sense and—er—all that jazz." He found himself lapsing into the idiom with Cookie; she was the sort who inspired lapses.

"Meaning what?"

"I'm not quite sure. I imagine it slows down the reflexes."

"Relaxes you, huh? That's for baby."

"You'll have to take it here, under test conditions."

"The mad scientist bit? You are gonna hypnotize me and get fresh, is that it?"

"Nothing of the sort. I merely mean I must observe any side-effects."

"Stuff really turns you on, eh?" Cookie bounced up happily. "Well, I'm for kicks. Spill the pill for me, Bill."

Dr. Placebo went to the water-cooler and filled a paper cup. Then he carefully extracted one of the yellow capsules from its cellophane container. He handed it and the water to Cookie.

She gulped and swallowed.

Then she lay back on the couch. "Wow, I'm in Dizzyville," she whispered. "Everything's like round and round—no squares—"

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Her voice trailed off, and for a very good reason.

Now it was Dr. Placebo's turn to gulp and swallow, as he stared down at the empty couch.

Cookie had disappeared.

"Where is she?" Ray Connors demanded. "Come on, where is she?"

Dr. Placebo sighed. He felt a horrible depression, quite unlike the shapely depression which had been left in the couch by Cookie's body.

"She—she cancelled her appointment this afternoon," he said, weakly.

"But I drove her over," the mustached young man insisted. "Went downstairs to do a bit of business—I'm booking a flea circus out in Los Angeles and I had to see about renting a dog so the troupe could travel in comfort—and then I came right back up to your office to wait. The receptionist told me Cookie was inside. So what happened?"

"I—I wish I knew," Dr. Placebo told him, truthfully. "She was lying right there on the couch when she vanished."

"Vanished?"

Dr. Placebo nodded. "Into thin air."

"Thin air, fat air, I don't believe it." Connors advanced on the pudgy little psychiatrist. "Come on, where you hiding the body?"

"She vanished, I tell you," Dr. Placebo wailed. "All I did was give her one of these sample pills—"

He indicated the packet on his desk-top and Connors picked it up. "This says *Time Capsules, not Vanishing Cream,*" he snorted. "Look, Doc, I'm not one of your loony patients. I'm an agent, and you can't con me. So you got sore at Cookie and pushed her out of the window—*this* I can understand. Why don't you admit it and let me call the cops? We could get a big spread on this." He began to pace the floor rapidly. "Real headline stuff—JEALOUS HEADSHRINKER SLAYS BEAUTIFUL PATIENT. Why, we'll push the Finch trial right off the front page! Think of the angles; exclusive interview rights, sob-stories to all the women's magazines, a nice big ghostwritten best-seller, a fat movie deal. Doc, you've got a fortune in your lap and you don't know enough to cross your legs! Now for ten per cent, I'll handle everything, you won't have to worry—"

Dr. Placebo sighed softly. "I told you," he murmured. "She swallowed one of these pills and disappeared."

"Fiddlesticks," said Connors. "Or words to that effect." And before Dr. Placebo could stop him, he walked over to the couch, sat down, ripped a pill from the cellophane confines of the pack-

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age, and popped it into his mouth.

"No—don't!" cried the Doctor.

Connors shrugged. "You see? I swallowed one and nothing happens. I'm still here." He leaned back. "So how about it, Doc, you gonna level with me? Maybe you didn't push her out of the window. Maybe you carved her up and stuck the pieces in your filing-cabinet. Hey, that's an even better angle—MAD BUTCHER CARVES CHICK! Or RIPPER GETS FLIPPER WITH STRIPPER. For ten per cent of the gross, I'll fix it so you—."

Young Mr. Connors fell back on the couch and closed his eyes.

"Hey, what was in that last drink?" he mumbled. "I can't see."

Dr. Placebo advanced upon him nervously. "That pill," he gasped. "Let me phone Dr. Glutea down the hall—he's a G.U. man, maybe he has a stomach-pump—"

Connors waved him away. "Never mind," he whispered, faintly. "I *can* see, now."

This was strange, to say the least, for he still had his eyes closed. Dr. Placebo bent over him, not daring to touch his rigid body.

"Yeah, I can see. Stars. Nothing but stars. You running one of those science fiction movies, Doc?

"Sure, I'm hip now. There's the world. Or is it? I can see North America and South America, but where are all those funny lines?"

"What funny lines?"

"Like in all the geography books—isn't there supposed to be latitude and longitude?"

"That's just on maps."

"I dig. This isn't a map, Doc. It's for real . . . but it can't be . . . no . . . no . . ."

"Please, Mr. Connors, pull yourself together!"

"I'm pulling myself apart . . . oh, Doc, if you saw what I see . . . like crazy, the world inside a big egg-timer up in the sky . . . sort of an hour-glass, you know the bit?"

"Go on," murmured Dr. Placebo.

"There's sand or something running out of the end, into the other half of the timer . . . and now . . . a big claw, bigger than the whole world . . . reaching out and squeezing . . . squeezing the guts out of the earth . . . *squeeeee* . . ."

"Go on," repeated Dr. Placebo. But it wasn't necessary, for Connors had already gone on.

The couch was empty.

The little psychiatrist blinked and shook his head. He walked over to the desk and, indulging in a symbolic funeral, buried his face in his hands. "Now what?"

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he groaned. "Physician, heal thyself."

Then he sat up and took stock of the situation. After all he *was* a physician; moreover, a skilled analyst. The thing to do was to consider the problem logically. There were several obvious courses of action.

First of all, he could call the police. He'd simply explain what had happened, they would simply not believe him, and he'd simply go to the gas-chamber.

Secondly, he could tell his receptionist. She was a sweet young thing, and madly in love with him as a Father-Image. Her reaction was predictable; she'd pop him into her car and they'd drive off to Mexico together, where they'd live happily ever after until she ran off with a bullfighter. No, the gas chamber was better. But why wait, when there were even faster methods?

Maybe he could adopt some of Connors' ideas to his own use. Perhaps he could jump out of the window, or cut himself up into little pieces and hide in the file-cabinet. Merely a logical extension of filing one's fingernails.

No, he was irrational. He needed time to think. Time to think—

Dr. Placebo stared at the cellophane envelope which still rested on his desk where Connors had tossed it after taking the capsule. *Time Capsule.*

"Alters time-sense both subjectively and objectively." Suppose it were true? Once again he picked up the cryptic literature and studied it closely. And all of a sudden he found himself translating fluently. Only the vowels were missing.

Instructions

Enclosed samples for professional use only. Each is capable of producing temporal dislocation permanently and translating user into another continuum or time vector."

It was plain English, all right, and even the last line of the literature made sense now. He read it slowly.

"Don't get your vowels in an uproar."

Excellent advice. Advice from an area where the time-sense was altered, where linguistics were attuned to another tempo, where others marched to a different drummer.

Cookie had vanished suddenly, Connors slowly. Why the difference? Perhaps because Cookie had taken the capsule with water and Connors swallowed his dry. Took a while for the gelatin coating to dissolve.

Funny, Connors seeing those hallucinations. All very symbolic

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—the earth in an egg-timer and somebody squeezing it; the sands of time running forth. Running where? Running out, that's where. In another minute *his* time would run out; the receptionist would run in and ask where his patients were.

He had lost his patients. He had lost his patience. It all came back to the same thing—call the police, run off to Mexico, jump out of the window, or kill himself and stuff his dead body in the file. Sort of a necro-file. Maybe he deserved to die, if he was capable of making puns like that. It would rise up from the grass over his grave to haunt him, for the pun is mightier than the sward—

No time for that now.

No time.

But a Time Capsule—

He picked up the cellophane container gingerly.

Why not?

It was a way out. Way out, indeed—but a way.

For one idiotic instant, Dr. Placebo took a good hard look at himself. A fat, foolish little man, driven by greed, who had never known love in all his life except as a professional Father-Image. A man surrounded by sensualists like Cookie and opportunists like Connors. What was he doing here in the first place?

"I am a stranger and a Freud, in a world I never made."

It was a terrible realization, a bitter pill to swallow. But swallow it he must. There was no other choice. Fingers trembling, he extracted the last Time Capsule from the packet and raised it to his lips. He swallowed.

There was no sensation. He floated over to the water-cooler and poured a drink. It gurgled down his throat. And then came the kaleidoscope, engulfing him.

Five minutes later his receptionist walked into the empty office. She inspected it, panicked, but eventually recovered and did what any sensible girl would do under the circumstances—called the Bureau of Missing Persons.

There was no answer . . .

There was, of course, no kaleidoscope. Nor did Dr. Placebo find himself entrapped in a cosmic egg-timer whirling in outer space. No huge hand stretched forth to menace his reason and he knew that he had not died.

But there was a dizzying sensation and he waited until it ceased before he allowed the autonomy of his nervous system to resume sway and blinked his eyes open once more.

Dr. Placebo was prepared for almost anything. If, indeed, the Time Capsule had been efficacious, he knew that he could have gone an infinite distance forward or backward in temporal dimension. Long condition-

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ing through attendance at monster-movies led him to expect either the titanic vistas of *papier-maché* cities of the far future or *papier-maché* dinosaurs of the distant past. In either era, he knew, nothing would bear the slightest resemblance to the world he had lived in, except that the women of the future or the prehistoric age would still wear lipstick and mascara.

There was just one thing Dr. Placebo didn't expect to see when he opened his eyes—the familiar walls of his very own private office.

But that's where he found himself, sitting upon his own couch. And most uncomfortably, too, because he was wedged between Cookie and Connors.

"Oh, here you are," Cookie greeted him. "Where'd you go, Doc?"

"Nowhere. I've been here all the time. Where did *you* go?"

"Never left the couch."

"But you weren't here when I showed up," Ray Connors interrupted. "Then I saw you and I lost the Doc."

Dr. Placebo shook his head. "That's not the way it happened at all! First she disappeared and then you disappeared. I stayed right where I am."

"You weren't right where you are a minute ago."

"Neither were you."

"What does it matter? We're back, now," Connors said. "I told you those pills were fakes."

"I'm not so sure. We didn't travel in space, obviously, because we're in the same place we started. But if the capsules affect objective time—"

"So each of us passed out and lost a couple minutes. Big deal." Cookie sniffed and swayed to her feet.

She glanced curiously at the calendar on the desk. "Hey, Doc," she called. "What kind of a month is Jly?"

Instantly, Dr. Placebo was at her side. "You're right," he groaned. "It does say 'Jly'. And that's not my writing on the note-pad. Who is this 'Dr. My'?"

"Maya," said a soft voice. "We don't write the vowels but we pronounce them. Indoctrinated associative reflex."

Placebo turned to confront the newcomer to the room. She was a tall, plump, gray-haired woman with a rounded face and shoe-button eyes. She wore a plain smock and a bright smile.

"You must be the new patients," she observed, glancing at the trio. "Armond did his job well." She glanced again at the startled faces before her. "I had hoped for a random sampling, but you actually exceed my expectations."

"We're not patients," Dr.

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Placebo exploded. "I happen to be a practicing psychiatrist. And expectations be damned—we want explanations!"

"Gladly given." The woman who called herself Maya moved into the chair behind the desk. "Please sit down."

The trio retreated to the couch.

"First of all," Dr. Placebo began, "Where are we?"

"Why, here, of course."

"But—"

"Please." Maya lifted a plump hand. "You don't deny that you are here, do you? If so, you're more disturbed than I thought. Believing yourself to be a psychiatrist is dangerous enough without any further disorientation."

"I *am* a psychiatrist!" Dr. Placebo shouted. "And this used to be in my office."

"It still is, in another temporal vector. But when you swallowed one of Armond's little capsules, you entered a parallel continuum."

"Hey, how about making with like English?" Cookie demanded. "I don't dig."

"This must be one of those crazy planets," Connors muttered. And she's an alien." He stood up and approached the desk. "So take me to your leader."

"Leader? There is no leader."

"Then who runs things around here?"

"Things run themselves."

"But who's the boss?"

"We all are."

Maya turned back to the girl. "I note your saying that you don't dig. Allow me to reassure you—in our society there is no need for physical labor. I'm sure you'll find a worthy niche here for whatever you are qualified to do."

"Wait a minute," Connors interrupted. "Nobody books this chick except me. I'm her agent."

"Agent?"

"Yeah, her manager, like. I find her work and collect my ten per cent."

"Ten per cent of what—the work?"

"No, the money."

"Ah, yes, money. I'd forgotten about that."

"You'd forgotten about money?" Dr. Placebo asked, excitedly. "Very peculiar symptom indeed. Rejection of the economic incentive—"

But Maya ignored him. Again she addressed herself to the girl. "Might I inquire just what sort of work you perform?"

"I'm a stripper."

"I see," Maya said, though it was obvious she didn't. "And just what do you strip?"

"Why, myself, of course."

"Oh, an exhibitionist." Maya smiled. "That's very nice. We

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have lots of them around. Of course, they don't get any recompense for it here, outside of their own pleasure."

"You mean they do it for fun?" Cookie demanded. "Standing up there on a bare stage with the wind blowing up your G-string and letting a lot of meatheads watch you break your fingernails on your zippers—this you call kicks?"

"I've had it," Connors announced, leaning over the desk. "The way I figure it, there's just two answers to the whole *kockamamie* deal. Either you're squirrelly or we've been kidnapped. Maybe both. But I'm calling the fuzz."

"Fuzz?"

"Law. Coppers. Police."

"There is no police force. Unnecessary. For that matter, no method of outside communication."

"You don't have a telephone?"

"Unnecessary."

"Then, lady, you'd better start hollering for help. Because if you don't send us back where we came from in thirty seconds, I am going to lean on you."

"Why wait?" Cookie bounded to her feet, raced over to the window, and flung it open. She leaned out.

"Help!" she yelled. "Hel—"

Her voice trailed off. "Holy Owned Subsidiary!" she whispered, faintly. "Sneak a preview at *this!*"

Connors and Dr. Placebo moved to her side and stared out at *this*.

This was the city below them, a city they knew as well as they knew the month of the year.

But the month was Jly, and the city too was oddly altered. The buildings seemed familiar enough, but they were not nearly so high here in the downtown section, nor were there so many of them. No traffic hummed in the streets below, and pedestrians moved freely down the center of the avenues. The sides of the structures were not disfigured by billboards or painted advertisements. But the most drastic difference was a subtle one—everything was plainly visible in clear bright sunlight. There was no smoke, no soot, no smog.

"Another continuum," Dr. Placebo murmured. "She's telling the truth."

"I still want out," Connors said. He balled his fists. "Lady, I'm asking you in a nice way—send us back."

Maya shook her head. "I can't possibly do so until next week. Armond must return and prepare the antidotes."

Cookie frowned. "You still insist we got here just because we swallowed some kind of Mickey

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Finn? You didn't smuggle us aboard a spaceship or whatever?"

"Please, my dear, let me explain. As I understand it, in your time-vector you employ a variety of drugs—heroin, *cannabis indica*, various preparations such as marijuana and *peyotl* which affect the time-sense."

"I never touch the stuff," Cookie snarled. "I'm clean, see?"

"But there are people who use these concoctions, and it does affect their time-sense. Their subjective time-sense, that is. A minute can become an eternity, or a day can be compressed into an instant."

"I buy that," Connors said.

"My friend Armond has merely extended the process. He perfected a capsule which actually produces a corporeal movement in time. Since it is impossible to move into a future which does not yet exist, or into a past which exists no longer, one merely moves obliquely into a parallel time-stratum. There are thousands upon thousands of worlds, each based upon the infinite combinations and permutations of possibility. All co-exist equally. You have merely gone from one such possible world to another."

"Merely," Cookie muttered. "So Connors was right. You kidnapped us. But why?"

"Call it an experiment. Armond and I worked together, to determine the sociological variations existing in several continuums. You will remain here a week, until he returns. During that time, let me assure you, no harm can possibly befall anyone. You'll be treated as honored guests."

Ray Connors stepped closer to Cookie. "Don't worry, baby—I'll protect you," he said. "You know I only got eyes for—*wow!*"

Wow stood in the doorway. She was about eighteen, with baby-blue eyes, but any resemblance to infancy ended right there.

"This is Lona," Maya told him. "She will be your hostess during your stay here."

Lona smiled up at Connors and extended her hand. "I already have my instructions," she said. "Shall we go now?"

"Over my dead body!" Cookie screeched. "If you think for one minute I'm gonna let you fall out of here with that hunk of *Bastille*-bait, you got another—"

It was her turn to react, when the tall young man entered. He too was about eighteen, but big for his age.

"I'm Kerry," he said. "Your host during the coming week. If you'll be good enough to accompany me—"

"I'm good enough," Cookie told him.

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"Now wait a minute," Connors interrupted. "If you go off with this gorilla, how'm I gonna protect you?"

"You better worry about protecting yourself, buster," Cookie told him, eyeing the clinging blonde. She turned to the waiting Kerry. "Off to Funville," she said, and swept out.

"Shall we go?" Lona asked Connors. "A week is so little time, and I've so much to learn—"

"That's the spirit," Connors said. "Come on."

As they exited, Dr. Placebo glanced at Maya. "And what is in store for me—something out of *Lolita?*"

The plump woman frowned at the unfamiliar reference. "Why, you'll be my guest. Stretch out on the couch and make yourself comfortable. I expect there are a few questions you'd like to ask."

Dr. Placebo was beyond resistance. Meekly, he sank down on his own couch—which wasn't really his own couch any more—and Maya promptly joined him.

"Really," spluttered the little man. "This is hardly approved psychotherapeutic procedure."

"I'm not a psychotherapist," Maya told him. "I'm your hostess."

"Need you be so hospitable?" Dr. Placebo protested.

"My feet hurt," Maya explained, kicking off her shoes and wriggling her toes. "Besides, is there any rule that says you have to conduct a sociological experiment standing up?"

"This is an experiment?"

"Of course. Why did you think Armond brought you here?" She stared at him levelly.

"I was going to ask about that. There are so many things I don't understand."

"Look into my eyes. Perhaps I can tell you better in that way than by questions and answers."

"Hypnosis? Telepathy? Rubbish!"

"Three labels, in as many words. Just forget that you're a scientist for a moment and open your mind. Look into my eyes. There, that's better. Keep looking. What do you see there?"

Dr. Placebo stared fixedly. His breathing altered oddly and his voice, when he spoke, seemed to come from far away.

"I see—*everything,*" he whispered.

There was the world he came from, and there was *this* world. But these were only two in a coexistent infinity of possible states of being, each subject to an individual tempo, and each ruled by the Law of the Universe, which men call *If.*

There was a world where the dinosaurs survived, and the birds who ate their eggs perished. There was a world in which

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amphibians crawled out upon the land and found it uninviting, then swarmed back into the sea. There was a world in which the Persians defeated Alexander, and oriental civilization flourished on the site of what would never be Copenhagen.

Dr. Placebo, guided by some power of selection emanating from Maya's will, sampled a dozen of these possibilities in rapid succession.

He saw worlds which had developed in a manner very similar to his own, with just a tiny difference.

A world in which a few tiny birds wheeled and took flight at the sight of sailing vessels, so that Columbus never noticed them and sailed on his course to the coast of Mexico where he and his men were quickly captured by the Aztecs and enslaved. So quickly did the inhabitants of Central America learn the arts of their prisoners that within a hundred years they built ships and weapons of their own, with which they conquered Europe . . .

A world where it didn't rain along the Flemish plains one night early in the nineteenth century—and next morning, Napoleon's cavalry charged to victory across a dry field instead of tumbling into a sunken road. After winning Waterloo, there was no Bourbon restoration, no ensuing Republic, no Commune, no rise of Communist theory, no German nation or Russian Revolution, no World Wars. And Napoleon VI was emperor of all the earth . . .

Dr. Placebo saw the world in which the Hessians overheard the sound of oars one Christmas Eve at Trenton, and hanged George Washington. He saw the world where an axe slipped, and a young rail-splitter named Abe Lincoln lost his left leg and ended up as the town drunk of Magnolia, Ill. He saw a world in which an eminent scientist suffered a minor toothache and neglected to investigate the queer mould which he'd observed, with the result that two of the men who might have subsequently developed atomic power installations died of disease instead, because there was no penicillin to save them, and a whole continent subsequently plunged into war and . . .

Faster and faster the worlds whirled; the one in which Adolf Hitler was just a man who painted houses and Winston Churchill painted landscapes fulltime instead of on Sundays . . . a world in which a real detective named Sherlock Holmes wrote a highly-successful series of stories about an imaginary London physician whom he called Arthur Conan Doyle . . . a

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world ruled by great apes, and a somewhat similar world ruled by a teen-age aristocracy who were proud of their blue genes.

"Possible," murmured Maya's voice, from a great distance. "All possible. Do you understand, now?"

Dr. Placebo sensed that he was nodding in reply.

"Good. Then, *this* world."

The panorama of impressions expanded, on a multi-leveled basis, so that Dr. Placebo was aware of sweeping generalization and specific example simultaneously. And slowly, a picture evolved. Dr. Placebo sensed and surveyed it with growing horror.

"But it *can't* be!" he heard himself muttering. "No Freud—and Havelock Ellis entering a monastery at twenty-two—no psychiatrists—no wonder you all became disturbed."

"*You're* disturbed," Maya's voice told him, calmly. "We're not. Look again."

Dr. Placebo looked again.

He looked at a world in which society was conditioned by biological principles, with Kinsey-like overtones; a world which lived in accordance to certain basic postulates. And as the examples expanded, Maya's voice provided accompaniment.

"As in *your* world, the sexual drive in the human male reaches its height between the ages of 16 and 26, whereas in the females the sex-urge is highest between 28 and 40. The only difference is that in *our* world this biological fact is accepted, and acted upon.

"Accordingly, our young men, at 16, are permitted to establish relationships with women of 28 or older, for any period of time up to 10 years. During this decade of association, there is no procreation—and, of course, no domestic or emotional responsibilities.

"At 26, the males are permitted to establish another relationship, again for a decade or so, with the females aged 16 and upwards. During this time, reproduction is encouraged, for the females are young and healthy and the males are fully mature; they lavish affection upon their offspring, who are—of course—turned over to the care of the state when they reach the age of 6.

"As both males and females reach 40 or thereabouts, they can again change their partners and seek permanent or temporary companionship within a domestic relationship—but without reproducing.

"Thus the sex-drive is fully satisfied during its period of maximum intensity, the reproductive urge is given full sway at a time likely to be most beneficial to both parents and off-

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spring, and the social needs of later life are gratified wtihout the rancor, tensions, frustrations, and naggingly permanent obligations which are the fruit of most monogamous marriages in your world. Simple enough, isn't it?"

Dr. Placebo sat up. He was once again in full possession of his faculties, all of which were strained beyond credulity.

"It's absurd!" he shouted. "You're going against all natural instinct—"

"Are we?"

Maya smiled. "Our society is actually founded on a realistic basis—pure biology. In the animal kingdom, 'fatherhood' as we know it does not exist. The male may protect its spawn for a time and feed the pregnant female, but it does not safeguard or exhibit affection for its young over any extended period of time, except in your 'moral' textbooks for children or the cinematic fantasies of your Mr. Disney. In many species, the male does not even secure food for the female, let alone 'support a family'. This is an artificial concept, yet your whole society is based upon it and everyone seems to believe that it's 'natural'.

"And when your poets and writers and philosophers envision an 'ideal' society, it is merely an extension of the same basic misconceptions with an attempt to put a little more of what you call 'justice' into them—even though one of your own writers, Archibald MacLeish, in his play *J.B.*, so wisely observes, *'There is no justice; there is only love.'* Ours is a world founded on love, and it begins by setting aright the biological basis of love."

"Monstrous!" Dr. Placebo exploded. "You've destroyed the fundamentals of civilization—the home—the family—"

"The so-called home and so-called family have destroyed the fundamentals of *your* civilization," Maya told him. "That's why you therapists flourish, in a sick world of emotionally-twisted youngsters who grow up as overly-frustrated or overly-aggressive adults; a world of prurience and poverty, of sin without atonement and atonement without sin, a world of bombs without balms. Don't look at your prejudices and your theories; look at the *results*. Are the people of your world truly happy, Doctor? *Are* they?"

"I suppose your way is better?" Dr. Placebo permitted himself a slight sneer.

"See for yourself," Maya suggested. "Look into my eyes—"

Dr. Placebo found himself staring and sharing; it was all a matter of viewpoint, he told himself.

He saw a world in which there was no transference of aggres-

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sions, due to sexual problems; a world devoid of jealousy and fear and secret guilts.

There was, to begin with, a complete change in the pattern of courtship; the element of rivalry, of competition, was almost eliminated. Male and female paired first for mutual pleasure, without the necessity of seeking the almost impossible combination of perfect lover, ideal helpmate, good provider, wise companion, and social prize which dogs most young people in their choice.

Later on, male and female paired for the purpose of reproduction; children born of the union of these matings were given a healthy environment of genuine love during the years when they were most loveable—and most subject to lasting psychological impressions. Then, at the time when they became encumbrances in a complex social order, they were turned over to well-organized state establishments for education and proper development.

Finally, male and female allied on the basis of fully matured judgments; as companions with mutual tastes and interests. Their early sexual drives fully satisfied, their reproductive drive fulfilled, their responsibilities in these areas ended, they were free to seek permanent or temporary *diaisons* on a fully realistic basis of compatibility.

Inevitably, there were other—and far-reaching—results.

For one thing, a change in personality-values—the notion of what constituted a "good" or a "bad" individual differed greatly from those prevalent in Dr. Placebo's world.

Less time was wasted, by young and old alike, in false and exaggerated emphasis upon presumably "masculine" or "feminine" attributes. A 16-year-old boy could *honestly* prove his masculinity, with full approval and satisfaction, on a biological basis, instead of spending most of his energy on football, juvenile delinquency, surreptitious indulgence in alcohol and narcotics and the assumption of an outward brutality designed to impress the female. A 16-year-old girl could fulfil her biological function in maternity instead of retreating into narcissism, virginity-fantasies, or a rebellious and unsatisfactory promiscuity.

The young man found sympathy and understanding with an older woman during his inital relationships, and learned to appreciate these qualities. The young woman found steadiness and strength in an older man, and was not impressed by reckless exhibitionism and irresponsible behavior. When the age-patterns of later relationships

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were reversed, an even greater mutual understanding prevailed; in the final maturity, there was a peace and a satisfaction born of genuine love and respect. In this world, men and women actually *enjoyed* one another's company, and there was no rivalry.

As a result, there was no fear of the domestic situation; it was not a life-long trap in which both parties became enslaved to a consumer economy because they had to "preserve" a so-called home at all costs. Because there was no set and permanent family status, the element of economic competition virtually vanished; there was no need to pile up great accretions of consumer-goods for conspicuous consumption or as substitutes for genuine satisfactions. And there was no "Inheritance." The state regulated employment and recompense but did so benevolently—for there was no familial tension-source to spawn the guilt, hate, frustration and aggression which resulted in individual crime and mass warfare. Hence a "police state" proved unnecessary. Simple miscegenation had done away with national, racial and religious strife. And the limited 12-year breeding span had done away with population pressure; there was abundance for everyone. Social and economic freedom followed as a matter of course.

Perhaps most important of all, there was a great increase in creativity and the development of aesthetics.

Dr. Placebo began to realize why, when he looked out the window, there were no advertising displays—why there was no need of automotive traffic or "quick communication" devices, or any variety of artificial stimulants, escape-devices, or gilded carrots designed to keep the donkeys in perpetual harness as they tugged their cartloads of woe along the road of life.

There was actually plenty of time to *live* in this world; no claws were squeezing; within this hourglass lay no danger of an eruption or explosion.

All this Maya showed him, and much more. Until at last, Dr. Placebo hurled himself upright again and tore his gaze away.

"Fine!" he commented. "Wonderful! Now I know why you found a youthful hostess for Ray Connors and a young host for Cookie. And maybe it does work, at that."

"I'm glad you think so," Maya said. "Because that was Armond's plan, you see."

"I don't see," Dr. Placebo confessed.

"For some time Armond and others have used the capsules to visit worlds in other time-vectors. Most of them were either too alien in their patterns or too

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dangerous to explore, but yours seemed most similar to our own.

"Somewhere along the line, your world went wrong in the area of social-sexual relationships, but we have studied your *mores* and folkways and decided to make a radical experiment. Armond believed *we* could, if necessary, live in *your* world—but of course, we wouldn't want to. He then determined to discover if *you* could live in *our* world. That's why he went down to hand out a limited number of sample pills—in the hopes of getting a representative assortment of specimens here for observation. One week should be long enough to determine your reaction—"

Dr. Placebo stood up.

"One minute is all it takes," he announced. "At least, as far as I'm concerned."

"You are a wise man, Dr. Placebo," Maya said. "It didn't take you long to see how sensibly we live, how sanely we have ordered our lives."

"That is correct," Dr. Placebo murmured, and then his voice swept upwards shrilly. "And that's just why I want out of here! I'm a psychiatrist, and a highly successful one. What place have I in a world where nobody is emotionally disturbed or maladjusted? Why, I'd starve to death in a month! I tell you, all this sanity is crazy—"

Suddenly he doubled up and fell back upon the couch.

"Why, whatever is the matter?" Maya cried.

"Ulcer," Dr. Placebo groaned. "Kicks up on me every once in a while. Purely psychosomatic, but it hurts like hell."

"Wait just a minute," Maya soothed. "I'll get you some milk."

And in exactly a minute, she was back with a glass. Dr. Placebo drank it slowly and gradually relaxed. It was good milk—damned good milk, he reflected bitterly, and no wonder. In a lousy, perfect world like this, the cows were probably more contented than any back on Earth . . . It figured!

"All right," said Ray Connors, pausing in his restless pacing to face Cookie and Dr. Placebo. "I got to talk fast because there's not much time. For a whole week I've been figuring out how to get a chance to see you two alone here in the office without Maya or any of the rest of these squares butting in. Because I got a billion-dollar idea by the tail and all I need is your help."

"How's Lona?" Cookie inquired.

"The chick?" Ray Connors smiled. "Okay, okay. But that's not important."

"Isn't it?" Cookie frowned. "You know, this guy Terry is the greatest. He's so—so *sweet.*

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Treats me like I was some kind of princess—"

"Never mind that jazz," Connors interrupted. "We got no time."

"Your idea?" Dr. Placebo inquired.

"Okay, now hear this. This is a square setup, dig? Both of you must have noticed what I did—everybody gets along with everyone else, there's no muscle, no sweat. Strictly Loveville."

"Yeah, isn't it wonderful?" Cookie sighed. "That Terry—"

"I'll say it's wonderful!" Connors exulted. "The whole setup is a pushover for a couple of hip operators like us. I started to figure things out, and you know, I think the three of us could really do it?"

"Do what?" inquired Dr. Placebo.

"Why, take over, of course!" Connors eyed him elatedly. "Look, we each got our own racket, and all we need to do is start working. Cookie here knows how to turn on the glamor. Me, I'm the best combination agent and flack in the business. You're a skull-specialist, you know about psychology and all that crud. Suppose we just team up and go to work?

"Remember that old gag about Helen of Troy, or whoever—the gal whose face launched a thousand flips, something like that? Started a big war over her, didn't they? Well, we got Cookie here. Suppose I started beating the drums, working up a little publicity, spreading the word about how this chick is the hottest dish in the whole pantry? And you coach me on the psychology, Doc.

"You know the way they got things rigged here—young gals with middle-aged guys, middle-aged guys with young gals, old folks at home together. Well, it would be the easiest thing in the world to upset the whole applecart. Get the kids excited about Cookie, and the old daddy-types, too. Teach 'em something about sex-appeal. You know what'll happen. Inside of a month we can start opening up schools—regular courses to give all the chicks lessons on how to really land a man and hang onto him. Give 'em all the techniques on how to play hard-to-get. And that means the works—we bring out a line of cosmetics, fashions, beauty-parlor treatments, promote jewelry and perfume and luxury items.

"We'll have the men flipping, too. They don't use money in this crazy system, but we ought to be able to take our cut in land and services. I tell you, they're so innocent it'll be like taking candy from a baby. Inside of a year we can work our way up so that we'll be running the whole

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world! Think of it—no police, no army, nothing to stop us! Wait until we bring in advertising, and juke-boxes, and hot-rods, and pro football and falsies—"

"You intend to transform this world into a reasonable reproduction of our own, is that correct?" asked Dr. Placebo.

"Reasonable is right," Connors snapped. "What's to stop us?"

"I am," said Cookie. "I don't buy it."

"You don't—*what?*"

"I like it just the way it is," she murmured. "Look, Ray, let's face it. I'm pushing thirty, dig? And for the past fifteen years I been knocking around, getting my jollies in just the kind of a world you want to turn this into. Well, I had it, and no thanks. What good did it ever do me? I ended up a second-rate stripper, tied to a second-rate nogoodnik like you spending all my extra loot on Doc's couch.

"I don't need to be Helen of Troy here. I'm just Cookie, and that's good enough for Terry—and believe me, he's good enough for me. I never had it so nice as this past week, believe me. Why louse it up?"

"Okay, so who's begging? You think you're the only chick I can promote? I got Lona. She's plenty square—one of those real sick good-hearted types—but I can twist her around my little finger. So I'll slap a little makeup on her, teach her a few tricks, and we're off and running." Connors wheeled to face Dr. Placedo.

"How about it, Doc? You want in, don't you?"

"You're quite sure you can do all this?" Dr. Placebo murmured. "It's a big program for one man to tackle."

"Yeah, but we got a natural. No competition. No opposition. Nobody that's hip. They'll never know what hit 'em. In fact, they all love each other so damned much they don't suspect anyone could ever pull a fast one, and they'll cooperate just for asking."

Connors walked over to the open window and gazed out at the sunlit city.

"Look at it, Doc," he said. "All laid out and waiting for us to carve. Like the old saying, the world's our oyster."

"That's right." Dr. Placebo moved to his side, nodding thoughtfully. "And the more I think it over, the more I believe you. You could do it, quite easily."

"I damn' well *will* do it," Connors asserted. "And if you and Cookie chicken out, I'll make it alone."

Dr. Placebo hesitated, shrugged, and glanced at Cookie. She

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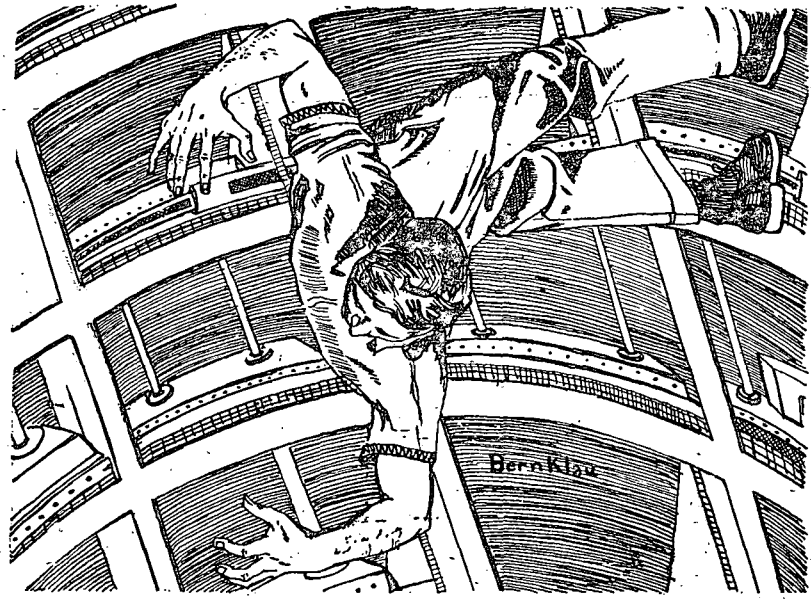

nodded. He put his hand on Connors' shoulder and smiled.

"A good idea," he muttered. "Make it alone, then."

And with an agile dexterity somewhat surprising in an older man, he pushed Connors out of the window.

The press-agent fell forth into the world that was his oyster; Dr. Placebo and Cookie leaned out and watched as he landed in the oyster-bed below.

"Nice work, Doc," Cookie commented.

He frowned. "That's the last time I'll ever do anything like that," he sighed. "Still, it was necessary to use violence to end violence."

"Yeah. Well, I got to be running along. Terry's waiting for me. We're going to the beach. See you around, Doc?"

"I hope so. I intend to be here for a long, long time." Dr. Placebo turned, staring past the girl, as Maya entered the room.

"Your conference is over?" the plump woman inquired. "Your friend left?"

Cookie nudged Doc in time for him to match her sudden look of consternation.

"A terrible thing just happened," she gasped. "He fell out of the window!"

"Oh, no—" Maya gasped and rushed to the open window, staring down. "How awful! And just when he could have joined you in returning home—"

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"Home?"

"Yes. Armond is back. The week is up, and he'll be able to supply you with time-capsules now. You're free to return to your own world."

"Do we have to go?" Cookie's voice quavered. "I—I want to stay here. Terry and I talked things over, and we hit it off so good together, I was hoping I could just sort of like settle down."

"And what about you?" Maya confronted Dr. Placebo.

"Why—uh—I agree with Cookie. Since that first day, I haven't had the slightest twinge from my ulcer. Something about the milk you serve, I suppose."

"But what about your profession?" Maya asked. "You said yourself that there's no need for a psychiatrist here. And, of course, there's no way of making money."

"I've been thinking about that," Dr. Placebo said. "Couldn't I assist you in your sociological experiments?"

Maya permitted herself a small smile. "Standing up or lying down?" she demanded.

"Er—both." A slow blush spread over the bald expanse of Dr. Placebo's forehead. "I mean, each of us is past forty, and under the existing order of things —well—"

"We'll discuss that later," Maya told him, but the smile was broader, now.

She turned to include Cookie in her glance. "Actually, I'm very happy about your decisions. And I shall inform Armond that the experiment was a complete success. I take it your deceased friend intended to stay, also?"

"He did," Cookie answered, truthfully. "He intended to make his mark here." She glanced down at the sidewalk below. "And in a way, I guess he succeeded."

"Then you can adapt," Maya said.

"Of course, we can adapt," Dr. Placebo nodded.

"All right, I shall inform Armond. And we can go into the second stage of the experiment."

"The second stage?" Dr. Placebo echoed.

"Yes. And we'd best hurry because there isn't much time."

Just how Maya got her information, we, of course, shall never know. Perhaps Armond read the papers during his visits to Earth, or maybe he just used his eyes and ears.

At any rate, Maya knew the truth—the truth behind the vision of the green claw squeezing the sands of time from the hourglassed earth. She knew that time is running short for this world.

Hence the second stage of the experiment; the stage in which not one but thousands of Armonds will descend in mortal

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guise or disguise, to pass out millions of time-capsules.

Some will come as salesmen, some as pharmacists, some as physicians. Naturally, techniques of distribution will vary; it will be necessary to disguise the capsules as vitamin tablets, tranquilizers, or simple aspirin. But Dr. Placebo and Cookie will both cooperate with their suggestions, and Armond and his crew are both knowledgable and efficient.

So, sooner or later, chances are you will be handed a capsule of your own.

Whether you elect to swallow it knowingly or not depends upon whether or not you're willing to swallow the concepts of another world.

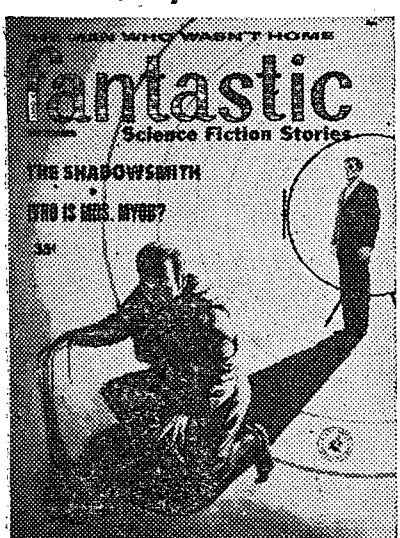
If not, of course, there's always a simple choice.

You can stay right where you are, and let this world swallow you. . . .

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

The gentleman kneeling on the cover (left) is a shadowsmith, the last of his peculiar profession, and the hero—or villain, if you will—of the brilliant short story of the same name by Arthur Porges in the September FANTASTIC.



Prize-winning writer **Henry Slesar** (most recent award: an "Edgar" for one of 1959's best mysteries) contributes a penetrating short-short, *Mrs. Myob*. And in *The Man Who Wasn't Home*, **Lloyd Biggle** writes a novelette of a spaceman's dangerous search for the meaning of his own life.

The September FANTASTIC also features another **Sam Moskowitz** profile — this time, of the caustic **Philip Wylie**, co-author of the famed *When Worlds Collide*.

Get the September FANTASTIC at your newsstand. It goes on sale August 23.

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Rats Of Limbo

By FRITZ LEIBER

Every writer must have his fun. One has his fun — and gives you some, too — in this tale, fable, sketch, scrap (crumb?).

TWO things—a very bad memory and a most powerful imagination — were responsible for the ghastly predicament in which I find myself living today (said the One Soul in Limbo to the Other, adding, "That is, if you can call this living.")

Of the two things, the bad memory was the crucial one (the One Soul continued, the Other Soul having signified both his interest in the promised story and his own considerable boredom with the local weather.) You see, I had never been able to remember people's names. This weakness had often landed me in very embarrassing situations. Finally I decided to do something about it. I enrolled in one of the new memory schools. There I learned to remember names by forming vivid mental pictures of the objects they suggested. For instance, to remember the names of the presidents of the United States, I was taught to picture first a vast pile (in fact, a ton) of dirty clothes ready for the laundry (Washington); next, the first created man with a twin beside him (to make it Adams); and so on.

My instructor assured me that I would be able to use this method with great success, especially since he believed me to possess a very potent imagination—the sort of imagination

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that creates inner worlds in which a person can lose himself forever. This, alas, proved to be only too true. (The Other Soul in Limbo grunted sympathetically.)

After finishing my course the first new people I met were named Joseph Roper Barnes and Helen Nively Crum.

Such names would ordinarily have dismayed me, but now I proceeded with great confidence. I began by forming an intense mental image of two large red barns. On the wall of one of the barns I hung a coat of many colors—for Joseph, of course. Inside the same barn I suspended a long, strong rope. To the end of the rope I tied a large "R," giving me my Roper.

On the roof of the second barn I balanced a very large cake crumb, about twelve feet in diameter. My instructor had assured me that the more ridiculous the image, the more firmly it would stick in my memory. Into the door of the barn I drove a long, keen knife. That still left over "ly" from Nively, so since it was pronounced "lee" not "li" I pictured General *Lee* sitting on the roof of the barn, dressed in a fine old Confederate uniform.

At the other end of the roof I pictured the most beautiful woman in the world, dressed in a sheer Grecian tunic, and I built a little Acropolis on that end of the barn to remind me she was *Helen* of Troy.

There they sat with the monstrous cake crumb between them. There was no other sight or sound in the world of my inner imagining—save for a faint, eerie scurrying which vanished as soon as I listened closely. I should have been warned by that, but I wasn't. (The Other Soul in Limbo nodded and clucked.)

Instead I proudly told myself that now I was ready for all eventualities. Whenever I met my two new acquaintances, I had merely to recall the grotesque picture I had created and the appropriate names would spring to my lips. I preened myself on my achievement.

It was about two days later that, venturing into the inner world of my imagination to admire my handiwork, I began to notice *the change.*

The crumb was drying. Little pieces were breaking off all around and falling to the ground.

Desperately I concentrated my mind. I tried to imagine the crumb moist again. I put all sorts of strange chemicals and super vitamins into it to keep it fresh. I tried to think the little pieces back up onto the roof.

It was no use. No matter what I did, the crumb kept disintegrating.

Besides, Helen of Troy had started to wink at me and make

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seductive motions which distracted my attention. I tried to make her dress less sheer, but I couldn't.

Soon the crumb was scattered all over the farmyard. I rushed about with a broom and dustpan, trying to sweep the crumb together and get it back on the roof.

But just then a lot of rats—that eerie scurrying was explained now!—rushed out of the barns and ate up all the crumb and ran away across the fields. I chased them but they all got away. Walking back tiredly, I began to worry about them just a little because they were something I hadn't imagined in the first place. I hadn't been trying to remember Gregory Ratoff's name or Terrence Rattigan's I told myself—or had I?

I got back to the barns in time to see General Lee sneaking off in the opposite direction. For some reason he had taken off his uniform jacket and put on the Joseph's coat. I shouted to him. He looked back at me over his shoulder. I got a shock. Above the grotesque rainbow garment, his fine old Confederate face looked fanatical and evil.

I shouted to him again. He darted into the other barn, the one with the rope in it. I ran in after him, but he had hidden himself. I didn't stay there long. The large "R" scraping the floor dolefully as it dangled at the end of the rope made a sound that got on my nerves.

Since then I have been wandering around the barns, filled with a nameless dread.

Most sinister of all, the long keen knife has disappeared. And also Helen of Troy.

I am afraid that General Lee, in his present dangerous state, has made away with her.

Stop! Look! Good Heavens, the rats are coming back! They are as huge as sheep! It must be the effect of those super vitamins I put in the cake.

There are no more crumbs and the rats are very hungry.

I have run into the barn, but I can't close the door. The rats have me trapped. I must climb the rope to the loft!

I am halfway up the rope. The huge rats are leaping up and snapping at my heels, but they can't reach me. In a few moments I will be safe.

No hope! General Lee's face, atop that hideous coat, is peering down at me from the loft. His eyes gleam maniacally.

I am saved! Helen of Troy's face has appeared behind his. She holds the knife poised above his back. She is smiling at me.

It is a smile of cruel mockery.

She has handed the knife to General Lee.

He is sawing at the rope.

AAAYYY!

THE END

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This is the fourth in a series of articles by Sam Moskowitz, quasi-official historian of fantasy and science fiction, which analyze the achievements and contributions of outstanding names in the field. The evaluation of these little-known English fantasists, M. P. Shiel and H. F. Heard, will be followed by one more, the American, Philip Wylie.

SHIEL and HEARD:

The Neglected Thinkers Of SF

By SAM MOSKOWITZ

WITH the appearance of *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* in 1959, a screen classic was born focussing the spotlight on M. P. Shiel, whose famous world-catastrophe novel *The Purple Cloud* formed the basis of the story.

The streets of an apparently "empty" New York City, a situation achieved by producer ingenuity that represents an epic in itself, provided the "sets" of the film.

A Negro coal miner, trapped by a slide, finally digs his way out to find that he is apparently the only man alive in a world that has destroyed itself in a quick atomic war followed by deadly fallout. The coal miner travels across the United States in search of life. He eventually reaches the Hudson River and goes on to explore the echoing canyons of New York. With the exception of his own vehicle he finds that not a car moves, not a human being shows itself, nor does a boat pass.

When the Negro (for all he knows, the very last male on the

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face of the earth), eventually discovers a white woman surviving in New York, his pride prevents him from accepting her. He will not perceive that the monstrous tragedy that has overtaken the human race has expunged whatever purpose racial barriers might ever have possessed.

A white man comes drifting in from the sea and, appraising the situation, feels that the only solution is for he and the Negro to take guns and hunt one another until the conflict of color is ended with a bullet.

Sickened by the senselessness of this "World War IV", the Negro finally throws aside his weapon and offers his opponent the opportunity to kill him. The white man cannot, and when the girl makes her selection it is obviously the Negro. As the white man turns to walk off, there is an unspoken signal between the Negro and the girl. The white man is asked to join them and the three walk off arm in arm.

The matter of whether or not the heavy racial turn at the picture's ending was necessary, since it was not a part of Shiel's original novel, is certainly open to question. It is even debatable that the screenplay was strengthened by this plot twist. What is not debatable is that for skill in contrivance, for a dramatic appeal to end all wars and as the most provocative thrust at color lines ever dared, this film achieves a measure of distinction which cannot help but make it a classic.

Matthew Phipps Shiel, the tenth child and the only son of a Methodist preacher, was born on Montserrat, Leeward Islands in the West Indies July 21, 1965. Shiel speaks at some length and with affection of his Irish father in biographical reminiscences, but for some reason never makes a direct reference to his mother.

Shiel claimed that his father did not preach for money and that his real source of income came from ships he owned. The reason for the implied reservation in the use of the word "claimed", rests in proven exaggerations and fabrications in many of Shiel's statements uncovered by his friend and biographer, the British poet, author and anthologist John Galsworthy. Shiel's assertion that, in a puckish frame of mind, his father once had him anointed king of an island in the West Indies by The Rev. Dr. Semper of Antigua, appears to have some basis in fact. This event was said to have occurred July 21, 1880, when Shiel was 15 years old. The island was called Redonda, a five- or nine-square-mile chunk of rock depending on who was in-

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terviewing Shiel, which was eventually annexed by the British government. His father, he reported, maintained a running angry fight with the British government for fifteen years— but to no avail.

The younger Shiel had a private tutor on the islands and then was dispatched to King's College, London. Languages fascinated him and he acquired a facility at reading and writing a number of them, including Greek, Latin, Italian, French, Polish and Spanish; an aptitude which at one time qualified him to be accepted as an interpreter to the International Congress of Hygiene and Demography.

More important, his extensive knowledge of languages formed the foundation of a tremendous vocabulary, and translating the idioms of the many languages he knew into English produced an unorthodox and pyrotechnic style that made him the despair of purists and the envy of his fellow authors.

This style was first brought to the attention of the literati when Shiel tired of teaching mathematics after a year of it and, turning to medicine, found he had no stomach for the knife. He produced three detective stories which were published in book form in both England and the United States in 1895 under the title *Prince Zaleski*. Strongly smitten by Edgar Allan Poe at the age of 17 and conscious of the acclaim won by A. Conan Doyle for his Baker Street inspiration, what Shiel produced was "Sherlock Holmes in The House of Usher".

Prince Zaleski, a mysterious Russian, solved difficult crimes by brilliant deduction. M. P. Shiel personally assumed the role of "Dr. Watson", but instead of Baker Street there was quite literally a gothic castle with partially unwrapped mummies. The stories are primarily of historical interest, actually being no more than pastiches, occupying the same category as Maurice LeBlanc's Lupin or August Derleth's Solar Pons. Nevertheless, this book caused renowned novelist Arnold Bennet to later comment: "I read, and was excited by, *Prince Zaleski* when it first appeared."

Shiel's next book was a rather ordinary romance, *The Rajah's Sapphire*, published in 1896, followed within months by *Shapes in the Fire*, a collection of short stories. The latter volume is much sought after by Shiel collectors as the first hard-cover collection of a number of his most bizarre tales of horror, including *Xelucha*, *Tulsah* and *Vaila*, the last later rewritten under the title of *The House of Sounds*.

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The style of all of them is beserk Poe with all genius spent.

Omitted from the collection was one of Shiel's better short stories, *Huguenin's Wife*, which appeared in PALL MALL MAGAZINE for 1895. In this story, the protagonist rescues a young woman from a Greek mob which is out to kill her for setting up a temple to Apollo in the modern world. The woman attaches herself to Huguenin with great fervor and he marries her. An inspired artist, one of her too-realistic paintings of a great cat-like creature, covered with wings and feathers instead of fur, disgusts him so that he strikes her. She dies from the blow but her last words are: "You may yet see it in the flesh."

When the house catches fire and Huguenin, in a mental ferment, opens his wife's tomb, he releases a living replica of her painting which tears his throat out.

It is very likely that *Huguenin's Wife* could have served as the inspiration of H. P. Lovecraft's tale, *Pickman's Model*, wherein a famous artist's monster paintings prove to have been posed by blasphemous creatures living in tunnels beneath New York.

In May, 1871, BLACKWOOD'S MAGAZINE in England published anonymously a novelette titled *The Battle of Dorking*, which has since been attributed to George Chesney. This story realistically projects a future war where Great Britain, then the supreme nation of the Earth, is crushingly defeated and then humbled by its conquerors. The speculation created a deserved sensation with its amazingly prophetic analysis of the factors which would bring about the rise of communism and the future loss of Britain's colonies. There were a half-dozen or more sequels by as many authors, the most famous of them being *What Happened After the Battle of Dorking* and even such personal accounts as *Mrs. Brown on the Battle of Dorking*.

This sparked off a vogue for future war novels which reached its zenith when George Griffith added imaginative inventions to the projected clash of nations in his best seller, *The Angel of the Revolution* and its sequel, *Olga Romanoff*, published in 1893 and 1894 respectively.

A popular author of the period, Louis Tracy, had cashed in on this cycle with *The Final War* issued in 1896. As a friend and collaborator, he prevailed upon Shiel to follow the trend, with the result that *The Empress of the Earth* was serialized in SHORT STORIES magazine, England, from February 5 to June 18, 1898, and the same year was

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published in book form as *The Yellow Danger*.

The concept that England might be conquered by the yellow men of Asia was Shiel's contribution to the literature of future wars. In later years, Shiel's publishers made the claim that the phrase, "The Yellow Danger" was coined by him, though it would seem that someone would have thought of it while the hordes of Genghis Khan were overrunning Europe.

The book suited the mood of the times and went into three editions in Britain and one in America. Through the lips of his Chinese strategist, Dr. Yen How, M. P. Shiel expresses his view of the inherent superiority of the white man over the yellow in the following comparison of navies: "Poh! Your Navy! Who built it for you? It was they. Your Navy is like a razor in the hands of an ape which has seen its master use it. The brute may or may not cut its own throat with it."

Yen How urges that the yellow races strike before the white man's progress has made the dream of yellow supremacy a forlorn hope. Uniting China and Japan, Yen How, through political manipulations in the Orient (where most leading European nations were involved at the turn of the century), sparks a frightful war on the continent. Chapter after chapter, Shiel spares no detail in describing the battle movements of every naval unit of the Great Powers of that period, even drawing sketches of the battle formations which are included in the book.

When Europe has almost exhausted itself in war, the Yellow Horde pours out of Asia, conquering everything up to the British channel.

A series of torpedoes aimed at the massed Chinese and Japanese fleet by the British starts a chain reaction of explosions which destroys the invaders' fighting units, turning the tide. Barges with twenty million Chinese are towed north into a maelstrom and sucked to the bottom of the sea. One hundred and fifty Chinamen are injected with Cholera and released on the continent. The plague wipes out one hundred and fifty million. England thereby becomes ruler of the world, since the only remaining power, the United States, cannot remain a single free island in a world otherwise ruled by England, Shiel surmises. The quality and importance of this work are on a par with the plot outline.

Heartened by his success, Shiel's next science fiction novel, which apeared in 1901, was again a future war tale, but with a difference. Frequently referred to as the "second-best" of his

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novels, *The Lord of the Sea* reaches an intensity of anti-semetism that provokes comparison with Hitler's later *Mein Kampf*, for which it could easily have served as an inspiration.

This is the background: The Jews, after being systematically expelled from every nation in Europe for buying up half the land and holding mortgages on the rest (literally), flood into England, where they begin the process anew. One-third of all members of Parliament are Jews. After initial prosperity, the poor British farmers, who must pay rent to the Jews, bend heavy under the yoke.

The prime Jewish villain, Frankl, is pictured as lewdly grasping for Irish girls with "phylacteried left arm" (The Phylactery is an amulet containing passages from the Old Testament, strapped on by pious Jews before prayer on the Sabbath). He also routinely forecloses mortgages as a prelude to Sabbath rites. Frankl, desribed by one of Shiel's characters as a "dirty-livered Jew," is interrupted at his prayers by the hero, Richard Hogarth, who whips him with a riding crop.

Tired by his exertions, Richard Hogarth, whose physical description amazingly parallels that of Shiel, returns home to receive the staggering news from his Irish father that he was actually born of Jewish parents, therefore he should take pride in his people: "*They* are the people who've got the money."

Framed by Frankl for the "murder" of a servant who actually commited suicide, Hogarth is sent to prison. He escapes, finds a meteorite on Frankl's property that is almost solid diamond, and with the money from its sale secretly constructs a number of huge floating forts, strategically placed to command the seas. He exacts tribute from every ship that passes and becomes not only the "Lord of the Sea", but the highest official of England.

In this capacity he has Parliament pass a law stating: "No Jew might own or work land, or teach in any Cheder or school, or be entered at any Public School or University, or sign any stamped document, or carry on certain trades, or vote, or officiate at any public service, and so on: parentage, not religion, constituting a 'Jew'."

In a fit of generosity, the Jews are reimbursed for their lands and Palestine, then almost a wasteland, inhabited by 300,000 nomads, given to them to settle upon if they so desire. Scarcely have the Jews left England, when the British government, through stealth accomplishes what it had been unable to do by

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force and succeeds in scuttling most of Hogarth's forts.

His power gone, Hogarth reveals that he is a Jew and is himself banished to Palestine where he is revealed to be a new incarnation of Jesus who, for the next sixty years, rules his people, teaching them: "'Thou shall not steal, therefore Israel with some little pain attained to this."

Only in his prediction that Palestine would flourish under the Jews does Shiel's novel show any merit, either as prophecy, prose or decency. It need scarcely be emphasized that the only difference between his credo and Nazism rests in the fact that he would have permitted the Jews to emigrate with their lives.

The same year as *The Lord of the Sea*, Shiel's most applauded novel, *The Purple Cloud*, was serialized in THE ROYAL MAGAZINE, London, January to June, 1901 in six installments and in September of that year attained publication in hard covers. This is justifiably the most highly regarded of Shiel's works and the one that eventually brought him literary recognition as well as, in his old age, a pension for "his services to literature" from the British government.

In delivering Shiel's funeral oration before an audience of thirteen on February 24, 1947, Edward Shanks, himself noted for an end-of-the-world story, *People of the Ruins*, which was admittedly inspired by Shiel's epic, said: "In speaking of Shiel it is difficult not to give the impression that he was a 'one-book' man. To some extent at any rate, that he must always be. There is a parallel case worth mentioning. Herman Melville will always be first and foremost the author of *Moby Dick*. For as many generations ahead as one can see, critics and readers will continue to pay, at any rate, lip service to that one book. But among the readers thus influenced, some will always seek in other books the qualities, however attenuated, which made that one great.

"So it will be with Shiel."

The Purple Cloud shows strong influence of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's *The Last Man* in its seemingly interminable yet individually potent episodes describing a world from which virtually all human life has departed. When the book was written, the pole had not been reached. A bequest by Charles P. Stickney of Chicago (a character who also appears in *Lord of the Sea*) offering $175 million to the first man to reach the pole inspires the organization of an arctic exploratory team. A physician named Adam Jeffson succeeds, with the aid of his lady friend, in doing away with a member of the party so that he

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may be substituted. After many hardships, the objective is reached and the area is found to be littered with diamonds from meteorites attracted by the pole's magnetism. Killing most of his party, Jeffson, in pasages reminiscent of *The Captain of the Pole Star* by A. Conan Doyle, makes his way overland to the sea to find those left aboard the ship are dead. On reaching civilization, he discovers that the entire earth is a vast graveyard. The cause: a purple gas issuing from fissures which has killed everyone.

On this device, H. G. Wells commented: "No one can dispute that some great emanation of vapour from the interior of the earth, such as Mr. Shiel has made a brilliant use of in his *Purple Cloud,* is consistent with every demonstrated fact in the world."

Jeffson's twenty year detailed search through the ruins of the world, since it is presented in synoptic diary form with frequent self-conscious flarings of rhetoric, is scarcely easy reading. Nor is the description of Jeffson's shift toward madness that causes him to burn city after city particularly pleasant. Neither is his unreasonable brutality when he finally discovers a girl alive, who was so young when the catastrophe occurred that she doesn't even know how to speak.

The reaction one gets on finishing the novel is similar to that experienced on completing Franz Kafka's grim *Metamorphisis:* It was worth reading, but you would hate to do it again!

Primarily as a result of this novel, Shiel received high praise from such great literary names as Arthur Machen, Jules Claretie, Hugh Walpole, J. B. Priestley and Charles Williams. Shiel, though weak at plotting, was a writer's writer stylistically. His mad literary rhythms, seemingly improvised, like a jazz artist's at a jam session, were a bubbling fountain at which new techniques of phrasing could be drunk. While the artistry was rarely sustained, it had flashes of splendor. For 1901, a passage like: "Pour, pour, came the rain, raining as it can in this place, not long, but a torrent while it lasts, dripping in thick liquidity like a profuse sweat through the wood . . ." anticipated the method of men like Thomas Wolfe at a much later date.

Again Shiel turned to the future war theme for *The Yellow Wave,* published in 1905. This is really a love story projected against the background of a war between Russia and Japan which threatens to involve the other nations of the world that have at

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last learned the ways of peace. Never one to coddle his lead characters, Shiel sacrifices the two lovers at the end to bring peace between the combatants.

In *The Last Miracle,* published in 1906, fiction is once more used as a vehicle to project another of Shiel's violent hatreds, one as fanatical as that against the Jews. Though the son of a minister, Shiel's almost paranoid villification of organized religion knew no bounds. He felt that the only true religion was science and that science was the only thing that up-lifted a man, whereas to the great faiths he attributed most, if not all, the blame for man's problems and ignorance.

In this novel, a scientist, through undisclosed means, causes the disappearance of people and their various crucifixions appear as "visions" in churches throughout the world. The novel terminates so abruptly as to be virtually unfinished. Its purpose seems to be a vast orgiastic diatribe against religion, rather than the telling of a story. For the solutions of men's problems, Shiel offers, in notes to the book, some deep breathing exercises which resulted in unfavorable, but deserved, comparison with Bernarr Macfadden, who, even then, was promoting "physical culture" to commercial success.

In the case of Shiel, his *style* of relation was so specutacular that many tend to think all his books are fantasies. Collectors read and collect his books for the bizarreness of his method, regardless of their literary classification. Therefore, while other titles written during the same period as those reviewed, such as *Contraband of War, Cold Steel, The Man-Stealers, The Weird O' It, Unto the Third Generation, The Evil That Men Do, The Lost Viol, The White Wedding, The Isle of Lies* and *This Knot of Life* might interest the devotee of Shiel, they are not science fiction or fantasy.

One of them, *This Knot of Life,* is of importance, however, inasmuch as it strengthens the certainty of Shiel's neo-Nazism. In many of his books appear the superman, forerunner of the super race. Shiel has a new term for such men. He calls them the "Overmen" and, in *This Knot of Life,* admits to having derived the term from the German word "Ubermensch". To round out his theories, his villain is a fiendish Jew named Sam Abrahams. In this respect, it would be a challenge for a scholar to find a single Shiel book in which there is not a direct or inferred slur at the Jews, usually accompanied by another at religion. *The Dragon,* issued in 1913 and later reprinted as *The Yellow Peril* in

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1929, is no exception—therein he classifies a group of English traitors as: "pure Jews, only, with their bad heredity, lacking the brains of Jews."

As might be inferred by the title under which it is reprinted, *The Yellow Peril* is almost a paraphrase of *The Yellow Wave.* Again, a diabolical Chinaman ("the only man who can outwit a Jew in business is a Chinaman —don't forget") sets the European nations at one another's throats so they are weakened for the poised Oriental invasion. The Chinese again come galloping across Asia and Europe like a movie retake. Shiel heartily approves of this, because it will destroy Christianity and religion: "Good!" he says, "Now, the scientist denies that apes, Negroes, bishops, bouzis, dervishes, are religious."

In the nick of time, when England is about to be invaded, the Overman ("Ubermensch") comes up with a ray that blinds all the invaders. The Overman issues the following dictum, which was the essence of Shiel's life-long philosophy:

"That Great Britain be considered my private property by right of Conquest.

"That taxes (except 'death-duties') be abolished; and 'customs'.

"That citizens be liable to daily drill, including running and breathing. (At the age of 70, Shiel claimed he was still running six miles a day for health purposes.)

"That Research and Education be the nation's main activities.

"That Education, transport, power, medicine and *publishing* be taken over by the government.

"That Doctors be 'consecrated'; and be Bachelors of Science; and be taught in 'Consecration' that 'To the pure, all things are pure'.

"That Clergymen now leave off uttering in public, for money, whatever comes to seem childish to average people."

With this book, Shiel ended a period of eighteen years of continuous writing and did not resume again for ten years. The only other book worthy of serious attention in this era is the short story collection *The Pale Ape,* issued in 1911, which contains some of Shiel's better short stories including the previously reviewed *Huguenin's Wife,* as well as a unique detective character, King Cummings Monk, who is somewhat of a ventriloquist in addition to his deductive accomplishments.

The purchase of *The Purple Cloud* as possible material for a motion picture in 1927 probably motivated Shiel's revival of interest in the writing of science fiction. Though the book was con-

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sidered as the basis of a dozen screen plays, it remained sidetracked, though not forgotten by Sol C. Siegal, who bought an option on the novel in 1956 after he ascended to the position of vice-president of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Shiel ventured into science fiction again the following year, this time with a short story titled *2073 A.D.*, which, despite its minor length, was serialized in THE DAILY HERALD, an English newspaper, on March 12, 13, 14 and 15, 1928. Later, it was included in a collection titled *The Invisible Voices* as *The Future Day*. This is an undistinguished piece of work, dealing with a future in which all cities are suspended in the air and men ride about in "air boats". A girl, wishing to test the bravery of her poet suitor, pretends that the power has failed in her "air boat", and that they will fall to earth. He comes through with flying colors and she agrees to marry him.

Though well into his sixties and living alone after his second wife left him in 1929, (his first wife died after only five years) a great deal of energy and venom still remained in Shiel when he wrote *This Above All*, a fable of immortality, published in 1933. Based on the topic of the eternal woman, possibly inspired by Karel Capek's *The Makropulos Secret*, Shiel's volume centers around a Jewess (Salome, of legend?) who has come down through the ages as an imperishable thirteen-year-old, and her efforts to get Lazarus (who is still alive after being touched by the hand of Christ centuries earlier) to marry her. In the meanwhile, so as not to get rusty while waiting, she has married a whole string of mortal men whom she discards as they age. The plot is constantly being interrupted while she emits interminable blasts against Christianity and religion, advocates science and research as well as long fasts, and slow and silent eating (preferably honey and nuts).

It soon develops that Jesus is still alive and that Jesus, Lazarus and the "young" girl are all members of a special race of long-lived human beings. Here, Shiel atempts to alter the theological picture of Jesus. While he concedes that the man was basically good and kind, he warns that he was also a Jew and, if alive, might favor his own people. He also retranslates and reinterprets passages from the original Greek, indicating that Jesus may have occasionally imbibed too much wine, and that he was really not against divorce. By this time, the reader must make a decision; does Shiel hate

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Jews because they created Christianity, or does he hate Christianity because it was created by Jews?

If the book has any worthwhile message, it lies in the preachment that age/immortality does not mean wisdom. Shiel, himself, seems an excellent case in point.

Probably Shiel's single best short story is *The Place of Pain*, to be found in the collection, *The Invisible Voices*, published in 1935. It deals with a Negro preacher in British Columbia, once highly respected in the community, who falls from grace and declines into drunkenness after apparently making an unusual discovery in the wilderness. This discovery he eventually confides to a white man who has been kind to him, when he feels he is dying from tuberculosis. It seems that he had accidentally found that a rock placed in the water in a mass of froth at the bottom of a waterfall would convert it into a pool that acted as the convex lense of a telescope. Through this lense, he implies having seen nightmarish and monstrous sights on the moon. He dies just as he wades out to place the stone in the correct spot to form a lens for the white man to look through.

The story is magnificently handled and Shiel exercises unaccustomed restraint in its telling. Though the Negro does not duplicate his discovery for the reader or actually describe what he saw on the moon, one is led to believe that he is telling the truth. If there is any flaw, it is that Shiel cannot excise his racial prejudice, as demonstrated by: "He had called them frankly a pack of apes, a band of black and babbling babies; said that he could pity them from his heart, they were so benighted, so lost in darkness; that what they knew in their wooly nuts was just nothing."

The last important work of fiction that Shiel wrote was *The Young Men Are Coming*, and it is at once one of his most imaginative and one of his most damning novels. A sort of super flying saucer lands in England and fantastic flaming haired creatures whisk away an ageing Dr. Warwick. They travel three times the speed of light to the first moon of Jupiter. There, the unhatched egg of one of the space creatures engages Dr. Warwick in a prolonged discussion on philosophy, science, sociology and religion. Dr. Warwick is given a draught of immortality and a parting message from the space creatures: "Farewell. I bear you this message from the Egg's Mother; that she sets a detector to resonance with your rays: so, if in an emergency

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worthy of her notice you, having on your psychophone, send out your soul in worship to her, she still journeying in this eastern region of worlds, your wish will reach her."

Returned to Earth and immortal, Dr. Warwick organizes the "Young Men" into a group of storm troopers to defeat the "old men" who are planning a "fascistic" movement. The political goal of the "Young Men" is to overthrow religion and substitute science (reason) in its place.

A revolutionary war with force of arms ensues. To win over the people, Dr. Warwick tells them he will perform a *scientific* "miracle" and challenges religion to duplicate, top or stop him. He sends a message out to the space creatures to create a universal storm, thereby illustrating the power of science over religion. They respond with a globular hurricane which sinks land masses, drowns or kills millions, and inadvertently destroys the air fleet of the "old men" who have the "young men" just about licked in a fair fight.

As far as bloodshed is concerned, Shiel scoffs at the notion that "The next war will wreck civilization." Wars are merely "inconveniences," he avers flauntingly, concluding: *"Cursed* are the meek! For they shall *not* inherit the earth."

If one were to assume the role of an apologist for M. P. Shiel, what could be said for him? It could be said that while he made no impact on mainstream literature, he did make a minor, if flawed, contribution to science fiction. It might be said that faults aside, his work displayed unquestioned erudition and scholarship, and that there were honest flashes of power and brilliance in his writing.

It would have to be admitted that, in the psychiatrist's vernacular, the man had a "problem." The manifestations of that problem were obvious, but its cause can only be speculated. Remember, Richard Hogarth in *The Lord of the Sea* comes very close to being a replica of Shiel down to the three moles on the cheek and the Irish father. Somewhere along the line did Shiel learn something about his ancestry that he could not reconcile with his early religious training? Is there a link between this information and a mother of whom he never speaks? Was it really the perennial Jewish villain, Dinka, speaking in *The Young Men Are Coming*, "If I am a bit of a Hebrew inside, isn't my coat as Christian as they make 'em?", or is it Shiel?

It is a classic irony of our time, that a man who was an anti-Semite, anti-Christ, anti-Negro, anti-Oriental, an ardent

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believer in Aryan superiority and a war lover is to be posthumously enobled as an apostle of peace and racial tolerance every time *The World, The Flesh and The Devil* is shown, as it will be for many years to come.

Shiel's concept that religion must be destroyed for the benefit of the masses and the world run by the pure application of science and reason was ably challenged by a talented British author, Henry FitzGerald Heard. The type of government Shiel had advocated now existed in Nazi Germany. The Jews had been exterminated and science was being used to conquer and enslave nations and "reason" was employed to keep the masses in bondage through falsified legalities, The Big Lie and the fiction of race supremacy.

Heard preached that science and reason could not provide their own morality. That a morality to fit progress could only be creatively devised and nurtured by religion. "There can be no dispute between science and religion," Heard states. "Science discovers and religion evaluates. Science produces facts: religion arranges them in a comprehensive frame and scale of meaning."

Up until 1943 when Heard's short story *The Great Fog* appeared in HARPER'S MAGAZINE, most thought that he had no more serious considerations in the world than writing ingenious detective stories. As a literary work *The Great Fog* is all but nullified by grievous scientific inadequacies, but it suited the mood of the times. In the story, a mildew mold develops, which throws off an impenetrable fog, curtailing man's activities to such an extent that the great matrix of modern civilization crumbles. The old order is replaced by a more rural, more religious, more considerate community of humans.

"Yes, I suspect we were not fit for the big views, the vast world into which the old men tumbled up," one of Heard's characters philosophizes. "It was all right to give men the open. But, once they had got power without vision, then either they had to be shut up or they would have shot and bombed everything off the earth's surface. Why, they were already living in tunnels when the fog came. And out in the open, men, powerful as never before, nevertheless died by millions, died the way insects used to die in a frost, but died by one another's hands."

This was pretty deep stuff for a man whose detective novels (*A Taste For Honey, Reply Paid* and *Murder by Reflection*) had won widespread critical acclaim. But Heard was going serious.

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They took *The Great Fog* and put it into a book in 1944, along with several other science fiction and fantasies. The longest was *Wingless Victory,* a satiric utopia wherein a race of highly intelligent penguins is discovered at the South Pole. A tour of their civilization by a human provides an enlightening contrast with our own. Like *The Great Fog* and other fantasies in the collection, *Wingless Victory* is no triumph of literary craftsmanship, but it had something to say.

Three years later, the appearance of *Doppelgangers,* "an Episode of the Fourth, the Psychological Revolution, 1997," heralded the fact that Heard was not only capable of thinking, but of blending his thoughts and philosophies into a novel that is a masterpiece by the standards of science fiction. It belongs in the same category as *1984,* both in purpose and literary quality, yet it warns that the frightful dictatorial world displayed in George Orwell's gruesome classic can reach us "Deceptively concealed in silk and velvet."

Heard's method has much more reality in a rich country like the United States than does Orwell's.

The rulers of 1997 control the people by giving them every luxury and pleasure, keeping them physically so comfortable and mentally so cheerful that there is no seeming need or will to question their government. Yet, they are just as much helpless slaves as are the people of George Orwell's *1984.*

A small group of thinkers, who have an organized "underground," are relentlessly hunted and, when captured, their brains are operated upon to excise their rebellious characteristics. Mass hypnotism is also practiced by the rulers to keep the masses in thrall.

One of the underground, tiring of ceaseless violence, attempts to escape to another country, but he is captured and surgically recreated to be an actual physical image of the ruler, Alpha. Thus, the origin of the title, "Doppelganger" or "double" taken from the German.

The Doppelanger takes care of routine governmental functions, thus freeing the ruler from a great deal of drudgery. However, the Doppelganger's fight against the government originally sprang from deeply religious moral grounds, he finds the murderous violence of the underground as offensive as the more sophisticated abominations of the government he now rules. He eliminates the underground and restores to the people a chance to start all over again.

The appeal of this story rests in the consummate artistry with

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which it is told. Though crammed with tens of thousands of words of philosophic debate, it moves in a polished manner with the suspense and breakneck speed that characterized A. E. van Vogt's better novels, such as *Slan* and *The Weapon Makers*. It is a modern "Utopia in Reverse" that can boast stature as entertainment as well as in subject matter.

The difference in Heard's approach to man's problems as compared to Shiel's is epitomized by *The Lost Cavern*, the title story of a collection published in 1948. Here, a man enters a Mexican cave and is captured by hideous, gigantic bats possessing a high degree of intelligence and an established culture. As he surveys their civilization and listens to their bizarre notions of the nature of the universe, evaluates their seemingly ludicrous moral code and studies their hopes and aspirations, he gradually feels that there is an affinity between mankind and these super-bats; that the human race is as grotesquely groping for the unknowable as are these frighteningly formed cave dwellers. Eventually, he overcomes his initial disgust and establishes a sort of empathy with them.

Deliberately carried to the extreme of narrowly averting becoming a horror tale, *The Lost Cavern* provides an effective plea for tolerance in mankind's relations. It underlines the point that a foreign people or another religion, even when seemingly misguided, may be sincerely seeking enlightenment and understanding. Conversely, it asks us to objectively stand off and evaluate our own cultural aspirations and judge if they do not at times seem a little strange, even to us.

It is too early to properly evaluate H. F. Heard in perspective. Technically, he should be considered together with a science fiction writer like C. S. Lewis, who is also stressing moral and religious values in his work. However, the contrast between his ideas and those of Shiel's functions to bring both of them emphatically into bas-relief.

It also dramatizes how rich, colorful and varied are the threads from which the fabric of science fiction is woven.

THE END

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This One's On Me

By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

The little shopkeeper had been set an impossible task. At least, it sounded impossible until the bottom fell out of Jensen's universe.

THE shop was small, dingy and halfway down a side street no wider than an alley. One could pass it a thousand times without giving it a thought. But above the green curtains across its window hung a small sign reading: *Mutants For Sale.*

Jensen waited for his astonishment to simmer down a bit before he went in.

"I'll have six," he said.

"That's being greedy," reproved the little man behind the counter. He was dwarfish, with snow-white hair, watery eyes, a crimson nose and a perpetual sniffle. If he had any brothers they were in attendance upon Snow White.

"Look," invited Jensen, gazing around. "Let's be serious, shall we? Just for a moment? Let's come down to solid earth."

"I'm there already." The little man stamped a foot to prove it.

"I should hope so," said Jensen. Leaning on the counter, he challenged the dwarf with his cold, hard stare. "These mutants, how do they come?"

"Fat and thin," the other informed him. "Also tall and short. Likewise loony and sane. If there are any limits I've yet to find them."

"I know who's the loony," Jensen decided.

"You should," agreed the little man.

"I'm a newspaper columnist," affirmed Jensen, making it sound sinister.

"That proves it," said the other.

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"Proves what?"

"Who's the loony."

"Good for you," opined Jensen. "Frankly, I like people to come back at me fast. Even when they're cracked."

"For a writer you're more than impolite," said the little man. He wiped his eyes, blew his nose, and blinked at the visitor.

"Attribute it to my especial status. At the moment I am a prospective customer. The customer is always right, isn't he?"

"Not necessarily."

"You'll see the point if you want to stay in business." Jensen eyed the racks at the back of the counter. They were lined with phials, bottles, decanters and queer-looking jars. "About these mutants."

"Well?"

"What's the gag?"

"I sell them. Is that a gag?"

"It could be," said Jensen. "Know what a mutant is?"

"I ought to."

"Sure you ought to—but *do* you?"

"Most decidedly."

"Then what is a mutant?"

"Hah!" The little man wriggled his nose. It went two shades richer in hue. "So you don't know yourself?"

"I raise them by the dozens. I'm a leading breeder."

"You don't say?" The little man displayed polite incredulity. "What's your name?"

"Jensen. Albert Edward Malachi Jensen of the *Morning Call*."

"Never heard of you."

"You wouldn't—if you can't read." Jensen bestowed a condescending smile and went on. "A mutant is a freak of nature created by one chance in a million. A massive particle such as a cosmic ray wallops a gene and in due time Mom has got a circus exhibit on her hands. So let me tell—"

"Dead wrong!" snapped the little man. "A mutant is a radical change in psyche or physique that breeds true regardless of whether naturally or artificially created. All my goods breed true to form. Therefore they are mutants."

"So you can change the basic form of things and guarantee that they will perpetuate their new kind?"

"That is correct."

"You must be God," said Jensen.

"Your blasphemy is unwarranted," said the little man, with much sharpness.

Ignoring that, Jensen studied the phials and jars for the second time. "What are those?"

"Containers."

"I can see that much. I've got eyes. What's in them—dissolved mutants?"

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"Don't be absurd."

"I am never absurd," Jensen told him. "You sell mutants. You've got to stash them somewhere."

"I do."

"So it says on the window. What's the gag?"

"I tell you there isn't any."

"All right. I'm a customer. Show me a few fashionable mutants. Something spectacular for evening wear."

"This isn't a rag shop," asserted the little man. "If you want something spectacular for evening wear you should try a low-cut gown. And you'd look like hell in it."

"Never mind about that. Hand me a mutant, that's all I ask."

"Have you any particular kind in mind?"

Jensen thought it over. "Yes. I want a pale-blue rhinoceros seventeen inches long and weighing not more than nine pounds."

"Not a stock pattern. It would have to be made."

"I guessed as much. I had a funny feeling that there was something special about it."

"It might require two weeks," warned the little man. "Or possibly three."

"I don't doubt that. Months and years. In fact an entire lifetime."

"I could find you a pink elephant," offered the little man, "of approximately the same size."

"They're a drug on the market. I can round up a herd of them in any saloon-bar."

"Yes, they are rather common." He smoothed his white hair and emitted a sigh. "It seems that I can do nothing for you."

Jensen said very loudly, "Show me a mutant. Any one. The cheapest you've got."

"Certainly." Wiping his eyes and snuffling steadily, the little man went through the doorway in back.

The instant he vanished Jensen leaned across the counter, and helped himself to a small, peculiarly shaped jar. It was transparent and full of orange-colored liquid. He uncapped it and sniffed. The odor suggested prime Scotch concentrated to quarter bulk. He put the jar back on its shelf, drooling as he did it.

The little man returned holding a fluffy white pup with a black patch around its eye. He dumped the pup on the counter.

"There you are. Bargain line."

"So I see," commented Jensen. "You ought to be sued."

"Why?"

"That's no mutant."

"Very well," said the little man, with offended dignity. "You're the authority." Grab-

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bing the pup he took it through the back door.

"Wise guy!" sneered the pup at Jensen just before it passed from sight.

When the shopkeeper reappeared, Jensen said, "I heard it talk. So does Charlie McCarthy and any other wooden dummy."

"Quite probably." The other rattled the shelves with a sneeze.

"Any professional ventriloquist can do it far better," Jensen persisted. "Being more polished and original."

"Quite probably," repeated the little man.

"For your information, I am a very persistent man," Jensen went on. "When I find a newsworthy item I don't let myself be given the firm, hard shove. I stay right with it until it explodes in my face. That's me."

"I'm sure."

"All right, then. Let's look at it this way: you have mutants for sale, or so you say. That's news. There are a few lines in it. And a few lines here and there make a column."

"Indeed?" The little man raised white eyebrows. He seemed baffled by this information.

"Now," continued Jensen, on a note of warning, "a good column by a competent columnist tells all sorts of very interesting things. People read such a column avidly. There are times when it tells nice things, times when it tells nasty ones. As often as not the cops read the nasty ones and are grateful because I have drawn them to their attention. They bolt out the precinct station thirsting for blood. Usually, though, they're too late because the subject of my remarks has also read my piece and taken a powder, see?"

"I don't see."

Jensen hammered the counter with open palm. "You have just tried to sell me a pup. It said, 'Wise guy!' I heard it with my own two ears. That's false pretenses. Obtaining money by means of a trick. Petty larceny."

"But I didn't get any money." The little man made a disparaging gesture. "Money, what good is it to me? I never accept money."

"You don't, eh? Then what do you want for the gabby pup?"

Glancing cautiously around, the little man bent forward, and whispered soft and low.

Jensen went popeyed. "Now I *know* you're cracked!" he said.

"I become mighty short of certain types of stuff," explained the little man apologetically. "Inorganic material is plentiful. Animal protoplasm isn't. Takes an awful lot of time and trouble to make it myself."

"I can imagine." Jensen glanced at his watch. "Show me one genuine, dyed-in-the-wool mu-

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tant and I'll do you proud in the Sunday edition. Otherwise—"

"I'm one myself," informed the little man modestly.

"Is zat so? What can you do that the Navy can't?"

"I can make anything." He paused, added, "Well, almost anything. I'm pretty well restricted to what I can lift unaided. Nothing heavier."

Jensen grinned insultingly. "And you make other mutants?"

"Yes."

"Then get busy making. I want a pale blue rhinoceros seventeen inches long. Not more than nine pounds."

"My powers don't function instantaneously. Manufacture takes time."

"So you said before. A good excuse is good enough for twice. Could you make a first-water rose diamond the size of a bucket?"

"If it were of any use." The little man arshooed with violence, shoved a displaced jar back into position. "A gem that large would be valueless. And it would take time to produce."

"There you go again. Plenty of talk but nothing in plain sight." Jensen nodded significantly toward the bottle-loaded shelves. "How much are they paying you?"

"Who?"

"The drug ring."

"I don't understand."

"Naturally, you wouldn't." Leaning more sharply toward him, Jensen displayed the cynicism of one long familiar with life's seamiest side. "What it says in the window is a lot of guff. It doesn't mean what it purports to mean. A mutant is a code-word for a shot of joy-juice as your hop-headed customers well know."

"The jars contain reduction fluids," contradicted the little man.

"You bet they do," agreed Jensen. "They've reduced many an addict's wad." He pointed to the bottle at which he had sniffed. "How much for that one?"

"You may have it for nothing," said the little man, giving it to him. "But I want the empty container back."

Taking it, Jensen again uncapped and smelled; dipping in a finger, he sucked it cautiously. At once his expression became beatific.

"I take back all that drug talk. I get the idea now."

He waved the bottle, doing it gently lest he spill a drop. "Illegal liquor. One hundred proof and no tax. All the same, somebody really does know how to make it. Somebody is a revenue-dodging expert. Yes, sir! Count me a customer. I'll be along regularly as from now on."

With that he tried a mouthful.

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It was like a torchlight procession parading down his gullet.

"Good Grief!" He fought for breath, eyed the bottle with unconcealed respect. It was on the small side, holding no more than one-fifth of a pint. That was a pity. He lifted it for another drink. "This one's on me. Here's to crime!"

"You have been very rude," remarked the little man. "Remember that."

Grinning at him, Jensen tilted the bottle and let the rest go down. Something exploded in his stomach. The walls of the shop appeared to recede to an enormous distance and then shoot back. He teetered for five full seconds while strength drained out of his legs. Then he bowed forward and permitted the floor to come up and smack him in the face . . .

Eons swung by, one after another, long, foggy, filled with dull sounds. They ended. Jensen emerged slowly as from a bad dream.

He was on all fours on a sheet of ice or something resembling ice. He was down like a dog, his body strangely rigid and his mind befuddled. His eyes were badly out of focus. He shook his head in an effort to revive his wits.

Thoughts gradually fought their way into his dizzy cranium. A drug depot. He'd found one and been too nosey. Somebody had crept up behind him and given him a large lump on the pate. Whee-e-e, what a crack on the noggin he must have received. What comes of talking out loud and asking too many questions.

"You've been very rude. Remember that."

Rude nothing. Fairly soon, when he'd had time to pull himself together and regain his health and strength, he was going to become downright vulgar. He'd take the little man apart and strew the pieces around.

His eyes resumed working more or less, mostly less. They remained peculiarly and horribly shortsighted. But his nose was functioning like never before. It could smell a lot of things at once including an overheated motor somewhere fifty yards away. The eyes stayed poor, in fact lousy.

All the same, he could see now that the ice was not ice. It was more like plate glass, thick and cold. There was another sheet of it far below and another below that. Also a strong wire grille fronting the lot.

He strove to come erect but his back was stiff and refused to bend. His legs wouldn't obey his will. He had a bad time wondering whether the locomotor center of his brain had been injured.

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Still on all fours, he edged clumsily nearer to the imprisoning grille, doing it with a sort of lethargic ponderousness. Voices sounded nearby but out of sight.

"She insists on a telepathic saluki and that's what it's got to be."

"It will take ten days," answered the little man's tones.

"Her birthday is Saturday week. Sure you can have it ready for then?"

"I'm positive."

"That's fine. Go ahead with it. I'll bring you a fat one when I come to collect."

Jensen screwed up his eyes and squinted myopically through the grille at the shiny surface opposite. More glass fronting a row of empty shelves. There were vague, elusive shadow-pictures on it. A distant window with words across its top. The window shivered with light and the words were reversed. It took him quite a time to spell them out: *Mutants For Sale.*

His gaze lowered to his own level, saw something else reflected a lot more clearly. He moved to one side, making little thumping noises. The something moved likewise. He shook his head. So did the other. He opened his mouth and the image gaped with him.

Then he screamed bloody murder—but only a tiny snort came forth. The reflection also snorted.

It was pale blue, seventeen inches long and had a horn on its ugly snout.

THE END

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What do you do on Sunday mornings?
Whatever it is, beware for your life
lest you, too, commit . . .

The Crime Of Mr. Sauer

By ARTHUR PORGES

TO BEGIN with, there can be no doubt that Mr. Sauer was a nasty man. He hated children —not merely the spoiled ones, whom any normal, red-blooded bachelor loathes by instinct until he gets married and coddles his own—but all of them, regardless of age, sex, or race. He detested puppies, sweet old ladies and baseball, thus proving himself so un-American as be alien to this continent entirely.

When his neighbors emerged in hordes on week-ends to lovingly clean, polish, and tune their glittering, overpowered, underfinanced monsters, Mr. Sauer jeered at this popular ritual as "auto eroticism." The offensive pun was not appreciated.

In short, compared to Mr. Sauer the Scrooge of December 23 was another Albert Schweitzer. His only virtue (and that one so exaggerated that it became a new, intolerable fault) was a heedless candor that never stopped to weigh the consequences. As a result, Mr. Sauer had been clobbered by infuriated truck drivers, kicked by indignant urchins, and beaten about the ears with loaded handbags by outraged grandmothers. None of these skirmishes had in any degree quenched his ardor for the hypercritical jibe.

It was most unfortunate, in the light of Mr. Sauer's character, that the courts found it advisable to make him the guardian of an eight-year-old nephew whose better qualified relations had all perished in a bloody riot at a basketball game in Ohio, where the game is taken very seriously, indeed.

It may be asked why Mr. Sauer accepted this awful responsibil-

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ity. Surely he could have convinced the court that no man was less fit for such a role.

But little Ellsworth did not come with his sticky hands empty. Held in trust for him was $270,000, of which his guardian would control the income until the boy was of age. Mr. Sauer hated children, but he loved money in a fatherly way.

Nevertheless, their association was brief and disastrous. Ellsworth, a large-headed, spindle-shanked child, apparently quite atom-powered, arrived on a Sunday morning. By noon Mr. Sauer had slapped him ten times, yelled at him eight, fed him seven, given him enough water to founder a thirsty camel, and was beginning to wonder if a mere $270,000 was worth it.

He was just brooding over that point, when Ellsworth, incurably optimistic and Christlike in turning the other cheek, approached with the newspaper's comic section; suggested hopefully that Uncle Wilbur read it aloud—"like Daddy does."

With a howl of fury Mr. Sauer snatched the garish sheets and tore them asunder. "Trash!" he roared. "For morons! Some day I'll read you good literature, like 'The Boys' Life of Schopenhauer.' Now get to hell away from me and digest those ten breakfasts you've had this morning. And do it quietly, or so help me—"

At that moment some minor deity, a match for Mr. Sauer in irascibility, must have found him utterly intolerable, for strange things began to happen. The walls of the room disappeared, and he was on a street, running desperately. His environment was alien and unpleasant; he was thoroughly aware that his only hope lay in escaping it without delay. Otherwise he was sure to tangle, at a great disadvantage, with a culture dangerous to one of his temperament.

There were those odd characters—not all people, either—for one thing. Their clothes were colored in remarkable hues: they wore, with nonchalance, red pants, blue shoes, and polka-dotted shirts, like foreigners or Californians—not good Americans. And their faces, while extremely expressive, seemed to lack a certain anatomical plausibility he was accustomed to. It was all very bewildering, and he increased his pace.

In his hurry, he collided with a small figure, bowling it over. Even here, damned old women gettting in the way, he thought. Resilient as a table tennis ball, the victim sprang up. A pleasant smile split her homely face as she reinserted a corncob pipe. Judging from a random whiff,

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whatever she was smoking in it, he thought, should have been buried some weeks earlier.

"Thass awright, Suh," she told Mr. Sauer in a voice that although harsh and cracked had the aimably superior tone that goes with an exalted position in society. "Lotsa young fellers is dazzled by mah be-yooty an' fergit whar they is goin'."

He gaped at her. "Beauty!" he growled incredulously. "You've got a puss like a dirty saddle, you old hag! Get out of my way."

Something seemed to explode just under his chin, and he found himself sitting on the sidewalk, his teeth aching. The old lady graciously helped him up.

"Ah had t' mend yore manners, Suh; thass mah dooty. Ah was keerful not t' use mah Sunday punch on an amatyoor." She thrust a jar into his hand. "Jus' t' show thar ain't no hard feelins, here's some o' mah best presarved turnips." She trotted off with choppy, bow-legged strides, old-fashioned boots clacking on the cement.

Seething with fury Mr. Sauer dashed the jar to the sidewalk, where it shattered and lay reeking. Once more, aware of some subtle deadline, he broke into a run. He cast only one glance back at the way he had come, noticing with dour wonder that a small, elderly rustic, with a face like a decrepit billy-goat, was at that moment stooping over the broken jar.

And now his path led through a land of distinct regions that didn't merge gradually, but began and ended with puzzling discontinuity. There was simply no transition. One moment he was traversing a quiet suburban community; and the next a hilly, rural area. Far in the distance was a sort of cloudy wall which he knew marked the limits of this insane world. There was no doubt that he was approaching it rapidly. It shouldn't be too long before he was away from here. His breathing was no longer easy, however; soon he would have to slow down, a step not to his liking at all. This particular universe, he inferred, was not quite congenial to one of his background.

But willing or not, he found the pace impossible, and slowed to a brisk walk, gulping deep, rapid breaths. Suddenly the pastoral surroundings shifted to city streets. There were many outlandish figures going about their peculiar affairs, but Mr. Sauer ignored them. He had a single track mind at the moment, and felt, in addition, that these creatures were both abnormal and unsympathetic. For the first time in his life, he was

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inclined to walk softly, and keep his opinions to himself.

But his nature made this difficult, and now he brushed rudely past a pompous, pot-gutted individual who stiffened as if offended, and fumed: "My word! No consideration for an old soldier's war-wounds—fap!"

And once a tall, vaguely feline form glided alongside of him, and with an ingratiating smirk pled purringly: "Dime for a saucer o' milk, Guv'nor?"

Snarling, Mr. Sauer stopped and lashed out with one of his heavy shoes. But the creature avoided the blow in a single lithe move that implied much unhappy experience. It murmured reproachfully: "Most ungracious of you, Sire." Breaking into a run again, Mr. Sauer left this fantastic panhandler behind.

Immediately the urban scene faded like a dissolving movie shot, and he was trotting down a cool country lane. A feeling of profound weariness gripped him, and he was about to drop to the thick grass when he saw an ideally placed bench that overlooked a pretty little lake. The very spot for a breather. Dimly conscious of a cluster of buildings far to the right, he stumbled to the shiny bench and plumped down with a sigh. Just for a moment, he thought; have to keep moving. But to rest was wonderful, and his thoughts became fuzzy about the edges. Nearby, but out of sight, children were chattering; he thought drowsily of someone's comment that the voices of young people sounded lovely when you couldn't hear the inane words.

He had dozed only a short while when an odd, sputtering noise awakened him. For a few seconds he peered about, bewildered. Then he snapped to full consciousness, alarmed and angry. Fizzing wickedly under the bench was a huge, potent looking red firecracker.

Squalling with indignation, he attempted to spring up, but the bench rose with him. The seat of his pants was glued tightly to the wood. What the devil was going on here? Cloth ripped as he gave a savage tug; and at that instant the enormous firecracker exploded, dazing him with its jarring disintegration.

More angry than hurt, Mr. Sauer loped towards the path. He'd have to get out of this crazy place; it was no environment for a man who despised practical jokes. Plunk! A cunningly hidden pit gaped beneath him, and he fell sprawling at the bottom. There was an exultant, childish yell above, and a small but very athletic wildcat joined him in the excavation. A flurry of activity ensued which ended seconds later as Mr. Sauer and

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the wildcat—which seemed all claws where it wasn't all teeth—scrambled out at opposite sides. There was not the slightest doubt who won the brief skirmish.

Staggering erect, his clothes in shreds, aware of a chilling draught where the seat of his pants should have been, Mr. Sauer found himself being soothed by a stocky, bull-chested man whose improbable black whiskers would have made an excellent whiskbroom.

"Dod-gasted kids!" the man spluttered. "Iss you fery much hurted?"

Mr. Sauer glared at him.

"The typical modern parent," he said, coldly offensive. "Do you even have enough control over them to prevent mutilation of the bodies?"

The man removed his yachting cap and seemed embarrassed.

"Mit dose kids, society iss nix," he admitted.

"Garrh!" Mr. Sauer retorted. He walked with dignified aloofness towards the road. This time he made it, and in spite of many painful lacerations began to trot, aware of precious moments lost among the delinquents.

Then, to his relief, there was a last flickering change of scene; the rural landscape vanished, and city streets, more to his taste, appeared again. Less than a mile ahead was the cloudy barrier that meant security. At that moment his hungry gaze alighted upon an enormous, expensive looking auto parked some twenty feet away. The immense garish thing, oddly unsubstantial, was nearly as long as a freight car, and consisted largely of chrome.

Mr. Sauer had always been law abiding. Whenever he cheated on his income tax—and that was never more than once a year—it was with expert legal advice, and only because Washington didn't use the money properly anyhow. Besides, in this hostile country he owed no allegiance to the law. He was an outcast fighting a whole degenerate society; one sane man in a den of violent lunatics.

Mr. Sauer hesitated only five seconds. Then he sprang to the car, wrenched open the door, and slipped behind the wheel. As he pulled away from the curb, there was an outraged bellow, and for some seconds a chunky man with an impossibly Irish cast of features panted alongside shouting: "Stop thief! Stop him! That's Maggie's car, an' I was supposed to keep an eye on it. She'll murder me-e-e-e . . ." His protests faded away as the car speeded up. With a mighty roar of power the low-slung vehicle surged ahead. The broad street stretched invitingly before him, ending at the cloudy wall—sanctuary.

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Ever faster the heavy car hurtled down the highway. Suddenly Mr. Sauer gave a gulp of dismay. A small figure had appeared in a cross-walk just ahead. It was obviously hopeless; impossbile to stop in time. Screeching to a halt with locked brakes, he winced as there was a crisp thud against the grille. He leaped out of the car for a single hasty glance. The little girl, a shabbily dressed thing with a messy haystack of yellow hair and eyes that were blank circles, lay in an untidy heap, dead.

Mr. Sauer made a lightning decision. The victim was beyond help; there was no point in staying here to face the consequences, which were bound to be serious. He had been going at least eighty, and had no friends on the local police force. Just a hundred yards away was the precious boundary. Past it, he knew, lay the world of reason he lusted for. Mr. Sauer ran.

But he managed to cover only a few yards when there was a frantic, hysterical barking a this heels, and a large, shaggy-haired dog assaulted him furiously. "Arf!" the mustard-colored brute shrieked. "Arf! Grrr!" Its teeth gripped his ankle. The dog seemed quite enraged, but oddly unwilling to do him real injury. Rather it acted almost like a canine policeman, determined to see justice done by keeping him at the scene of the crime until the proper officials arrived.

Wrestling with the heavy beast, vaguely airdale in build, Mr. Sauer rolled off the highway, swearing. As they thrashed about in the surrealistic underbrush, the man spotted a jagged rock. Gripping the dog's collar in his left hand, he seized the rock in his right; and as the animal, whimpering, attempted to break their clinch, brought the heavy stone down on its head. With a choked yelp, the dog lay still.

Mr. Sauer got up, gasping for breath. He had taken a single step towards freedom, when powerful fingers clutched at his shoulder. Whirling, he looked into an angular face, a jaw that thrust out at least three inches past the nose.

"I saw the whole thing," his captors said sternly. "You were speeding—in a stolen car—and you killed Little Orphan Annie. You'll get the limit for this." There was a click as cool metal circled his wrists. "You might have had a chance if it had been Dennis or—uh—Little Iodine," the detective said regretfully; "but Annie—!" My name is Tracy, and you'd better come quietly."

Mr. Sauer took a last, longing look at the misty barrier, now forever beyond him, and came. **THE END**

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Who knows what mysteries lie behind the shell? What long-forgotten sights and sounds leap to secret meaning? One can find out only by entering . . .

THE HOUSE

By FREDERIC BROWN

HE HESITATED upon the porch and looked a last long look upon the road behind him and the green trees that grew beside it and the yellow fields and the distant hill and the bright sunlight. Then he opened the door and entered and the door swung shut behind him.

He turned as it clicked and saw only blank wall. There was no knob and no keyhole, and the edges of the door, if there were edges, were so cunningly fitted into the carven paneling that he could not discern its outline.

Before him lay the cobwebbed hallway. The floor was thick with dust and through the dust wound two so slender curving trails as might have been made by two very small snakes or two very large caterpillars. They were very faint trails and he did not notice them until he was opposite the first doorway to the right, upon which was the inscription "Semper Fidelis" in old English lettering.

Beyond this door he found himself in a small red room, no larger than a large closet. A single chair in this room lay on its side, one leg broken and dangling by a thin splinter. On the nearest wall the only picture was a framed portrait of Benjamin Franklin. It hung askew and the glass covering it was cracked. There was no dust upon the floor

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and the room appeared to have been recently cleaned. In the center of the floor lay a bright curved scimitar. There were red stains upon its hilt, and upon the edge of the blade was a thick coating of green ooze. Aside from these things the room was empty.

After he had stood in this room for a long time, he crossed the hallway and entered the room opposite. It was large, the size of a small auditorium, but the bare black walls made it seem smaller at first glance. There was row upon row of purple plush theater seats, but there was no stage or platform and the rows of seats started only a few inches from the blank wall they faced. There was nothing else in the room, but upon the nearest seat lay a neat pile of programs. One of these he took and found it blank save for two advertisements on the back cover, one for Prophylactic toothbrushes and the other for choice building lots in the Sub Rosa Subdivision. Upon a page near the front of the program he saw that someone had written with a lead pencil the word or name "Garfinkle."

He thrust the program into his pocket and returned to the hallway, along which he walked in search of the stairs.

Behind one closed door which he passed he heard someone, obviously amateur, picking out tunes on what sounded like a Hawaiian guitar. He knocked upon this door but a scurrying of footsteps and silence was the only answer. When he opened the door and peered within he saw only a decaying corpse hanging from the chandelier, and an odor hurled itself upon him so nauseating that he closed the door hastily, and walked on to the stairway.

The stairway was narrow and winding. There was no banister, and he clung close to the wall as he ascended. He saw that the first seven steps from the bottom had been scrubbed clean but in the dust above the seventh step he saw again the two winding trails. Upon the third step from the top they converged, and vanished.

He entered the first door to his right and found himself in a spacious bedroom, lavishly furnished. He crossed immediately to the carven poster-bed and pulled aside the curtains. The bed was neatly made, and he saw a slip of paper pinned to the smoothed pillow. Upon it was written hastily in a woman's handwriting, "Denver, 1909." Upon the reverse side, neatly written in ink in another handwriting was an algebraic equation.

He left this room quietly and stopped short just outside the

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door to listen to a sound that came from behind a black doorway across the hall.

It was the deep voice of a man chanting in a strange and unfamiliar tongue. It rose and fell in a monotonous cadence like a Buddhist hymn, yet over and over recurred the word "Ragnarock." The word seemed vaguely familiar, and the voice sounded like his own voice, but muffled by many things.

With bowed head he stood until the voice died away into a blue trembling silence and twilight crept into the hallway with the stealthiness of a practiced thief.

Then as though awakening, he walked along the now-silent hallway until he came to the third and last door and he saw that they had printed his name upon the upper panel in tiny letters of gold. Perhaps radium had been mixed with the gold for the letters glowed in the hallway's dimness.

He stood for a long moment with his hand upon the knob, and then at last he entered and closed the door behind him. He heard the click of the latch and knew that it would never open again, yet he felt no fear with this realization.

The darkness was a black tangible thing that sprang back from him when he struck a match. He saw then that the room was a counterpart of the east bedroom of his father's house near Wilmington, the room in which he had been born. He knew, now, just where to look for candles. There were two in the drawer, and the stump of a third, and he knew that, burned one at a time, they would last for almost ten hours. He lighted the first and stood it in the brass bracket on the wall, from whence it cast dancing shadows from each chair, from the bed, and from the small waiting cradle that stood beside the bed.

Upon the table beside his mother's sewing basket lay the March, 1887, issue of *Harper's Magazine*, and he took it up and glanced idly through its pages.

At length he dropped it to the floor and thought tenderly of his wife who had died many years ago, and a faint smile trembled upon his lips as he remembered a dozen little incidents of the years of days and nights they had spent together. He thought, too, of many other things as the minutes went by.

It was not until the ninth hour when but half an inch of candle remained and darkness began to gather in the farther corners of the room and to creep closer, that he screamed, and beat and clawed at the door until his hands were a raw and bloody pulp.

THE END

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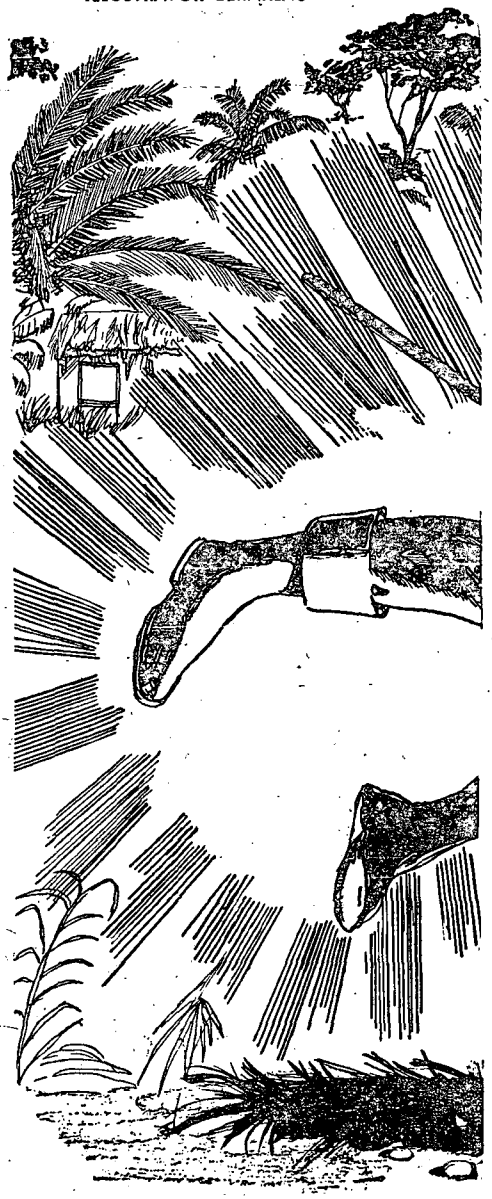
The CRISPIN AFFAIR

By JACK SHARKEY

(Conclusion)

ILLUSTRATOR BERNKLAU



Synopsis Of Part One

SYNOPSIS

On Sept. 18, 1983, I, Morgan Blane, young, attractive, debonair, and astronomically ignorant young millionaire had never heard of the planet Crispin.

A few weeks later I was on it, fighting for my life. The reason: Lora Merrick, and her story about how a wicked lawyer named Maximilian Barton was trying to cheat her of a fortune. Her grandfather had bequeathed to her immense deposits of copper on the planet Crispin. Because copper is the main

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ingredient in a new method of spaceship propulsion, the mine would make her fabulously wealthy. But Barton had stolen the map to the mine, with the connivance of his secretary, Flax Dempster, and was on his way to Crispin to stake his own claim. Lora inveigled me to buy her a ship and go to Crispin with her to do battle.

We struggled to a crash landing despite the fact that the copper deposits of Crispin almost overpowered our drive. But that was just the start of our troubles. The ship and its radio were useless. I moved off through the jungle, with its trees like stripped and inverted umbrellas, with red leaves on the branches.

Naturally, I got lost. I had a slight run-in with a pack of golden wolves with forked tails, heard a strange noise in the forest, and ran into the red-headed Miss Dempster, as stranded and as scared as I was. She and Max and their pilots had crashed on Crispin, too. I found her pilot, hung up in a tree by his parachute, and food for the golden wolves.

When I proved adamant to Flax's charms—meaning she couldn't persuade me to see her and Max's side of the case—she took my guns and left me in the tree where we had holed up for the night. Soon after that I saw the local natives: hairy, horned, tusked—ugly, in short, and carrying double-pronged spears. Carefully I trailed them to their village. Someone seemed to be in the local pokey. It was, I discovered, Lora and Binky. I was all set to rescue them when a hairy arm grabbed me and tossed me into the hut with them.

"What's that?" screamed my little girl.

"Part two of Life with Lora," I said.

CHAPTER 7

HAVE they hurt you? Are you all right?" I said to Lora in the absolute darkness, the hole being already rethatched.

"Aw, I'm okay," Binky grunted. "They didn't do nothing 'cept tie us up and throw us in here. What we're mostly worried about is food and water."

"They took away our canteens and rations," Lora's voice explained, gloomily. "They brought us a bowl of some kind of fruit, but after one bite, I had to spit it out. It's almost completely saline, in a cupric way. Undoubtedly deadly for Earth organisms."

"You make me feel like something under a microscope," I complained. "But what happened to your pistols?"

"I tried to use mine when they surrounded us," Binky said disgustedly. "But they'd come in

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too close by the time I spotted them. One of them grabbed it, and it went off. So just like a bunch of kids, they all had to have a turn firing it—into the ground, though; they're not so dumb they don't recognize a weapon when they see it—and after all the rounds were spent, they tossed it away, and did the same with Lora's. Where's yours?"

I almost told him, then decided the hell with it. Lora might ask how Flax happened to be close enough to snag it. "... Lost it ..." I laughed weakly. "Some hero, huh?"

"Didja notice all that stuff on their forearms?" Binky said conspiratorily. "Damnedest thing I ever saw!"

"You mean that shaggy growth of hair?" I said, puzzled by his bemusement.

"That's the stuff I mean," said Binky, "only, it ain't hair, Mr. Blane— It's rubber!"

"You're crazy!" I said, shaken by his pronouncement. "Why the hell would they have rubber for hair?"

"I think it's Crispin, Morgan," Lora said, softly. "Something to do with the planetary crust. Maybe they have electriicty instead of blood—"

"Oh, *come* now!" I scoffed. "And maybe those horns are really radar antennae!"

"Quite possibly," she said, and I gave the subject up.

We lay there on the ground inside the hut for awhile, and I tried unsuccessfully to loosen the heavy thongs that bound my wrists and ankles into painful immobility. Giving a final futile tug, I turned my head toward where Lora's voice came from, and said, "Lora— Tell me something— If the rivers here are heavy with copper salts, and the trees and ground are spiked with the stuff, too— Who the hell needs a *mine?* So far as I can see, a minerologist could exploit *any* old place on Crispin ..."

"Probably a matter of convenience," said Lora, "or else my grandfather didn't know just how cupric the place was ... See, Morgan, if it's to be profitable, the copper must be more or less readily available. In the water, it involves a distilling process to take out the salts, and then a tedious chemical process to reduce it to pure copper. Or in the trees—well—you've got to burn the wood and leaves, then do more chemistry to get the metal from the ashes. So I figure my grandfather found it in a better state. Copper is one ore that occurs in its natural state. It's a little heavier than iron, Morgan, and not quite as atomically active, so its pure state is found as often as its oxides—"

"Okay, okay," I interrupted.

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"I'll take your word for it, Lora . . ."

"You know," she said, after a moment, "this is the first occasion you've called me that. You usually say Merrick, as if I were a business associate, or a subordinate rank in your army or something."

"Habit," I said. "When you have gone out with as many girls as I have, you take to doing that. Saves embarrassing moments when you happen to have two or more with the same first names . . ." I paused, but Lora didn't say anything. Which was maybe just as well. "So," I went on, "what do we do about getting out of here?"

"We already tried rolling around and nibbling at these cords with our teeth," Binky said, discouraged. "They don't give way even a little bit."

"What do you think they plan to do with us?" Lora asked.

"If they're cannibals," I said, "let's hope we prove to be as poisonous to them as their planet is to us."

"Lotta good it'll do us if they get ptomaine *after* we've been run through their salami-slicer!" Binky growled. "If I could only get back to the Brunhilde!"

"Back?" I said. "What for?"

"That's where we were heading when a war-party of these rubber-haired ginks picked us up," Binky said. "First off, we were going there because it was the likely place for you to go if we got lost, but secondly, I thought of a way we could signal."

"How?" I said, fascinated.

"The atomic heater in the tail section," said Binky. "If I draw out the dampers, I may be able to rig it so it goes off, and the military base on the next planet will spot it on the detectors."

"You mean Radnor?" I said, then wished I hadn't.

"Morgan—" said Lora, slowly, "where did you learn about Radnor? The last time I saw you, you didn't know the moon from the asteroid belt. Now you know the name of a far-flung military outpost in another galaxy . . . that's rather curious."

"Uh—" I said, thinking fast. I could say I'd read it someplace, or that they'd mentioned it, or that— But what the hell, you can go just so far in a deception before you're caught. I decided to tell all. "Lora, I didn't want to say this before— Didn't want to dim your hopes," I added quickly, putting my motivations on an altruistic level they didn't deserve. "But— Barton and that Dempster woman are on Crispin. She's the one took my gun . . ."

"*They're* here?!" Lora groaned. "That's terrible! If they get to the mine first, they can destroy any evidence that my

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grandfather ever was—*how* did she get your gun?"

I blurted, "Just reached out and snatched it."

"Just like that?"

"Yeah. Just like that."

"Oh."

"Uh . . . Yeah. Well, anyhow, she's got it, now. She and Barton came with pilots in separate Flickers from Radnor. Only the Flickers are the new ones, with the magnetic drive. So Flax—So this Dempster woman crashed, and her pilot got eaten by animals, but I have to assume that Barton's down, too. Whether dead or alive, I don't know . . ."

"Then she was alone with you," Lora said tonelessly.

"So what!" I snapped. "Weren't you alone with Binky? And what do you care who I'm alone with?"

"What do you care who *I'm* alone with?"

We lay there in silence awhile, then I said, "Look, we may be the main course at the next sound of the dinner chimes, Lora. It's foolish to quarrel . . ."

"Is it?" she said coolly.

"Damned right!" Binky's voice exploded. "You two can have your personal differences out later. Let's see about getting out of here, first!"

"What do we do?" I said sarcastically. "Butt our way out through the back wall and *hop* to safety?"

"That's not bad for a last resort," Binky said. "But if we could only get these cords off, we could maybe grab the guard, and scram before sunrise. Once the village is awake, we're sunk."

"Well," I said, "we don't have any knives, and you say that biting didn't do any good, so . . . There's one way left." I shifted my body over toward Binky. "Here, reach in my pants pocket. I've got some matches there."

"You think we can *burn* these things off?" Binky said. "My hands are behind my back, Mr. Blane . . ."

"So are mine," I growled. "You just light the matches, and hold them till they singe your fingers. I'll try putting this cord in the flame. I'll guide it by the pain in my wrists."

"Don't be silly," Lora grunted, as she wriggled across toward us in the dark. "Binky can hold the matches, you hold your wrists out, and I'll watch what's happening and give directions."

"Fair enough," I said, and we got to work.

It was long, painful and tedious, most of the pain from a natural confusion about left and right when one's hands are behind the back, and another person holding the flame is facing the other direction, and the

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third party giving directions is at even another viewpoint. However, we had no trouble with up and down, which was a help.

All in all, it took maybe twenty minutes before the things grew carbonized enough to snap. Then, my hands free, I undid my ankles, then Binky's wrists, then he undid Lora's while I undid *his* ankles, and—At any rate, we were all free.

"Now what?" Binky whispered.

We hadn't been whispering before, but now that we were no longer bound, it seemed the thing to do.

"We could try going through that thatch, but they might have another guard posted, now. But there's one thing we can do: Right outside this wall, to the right of the door, is a whole rack of those pronged spears. If we just open the door and move fast enough, we may be able to terrorize the guard into silence with them."

"Why don't we just clout him?" Binky argued.

"Because if his head can grow these horns, it's probably bone-enforced for butting or goring, and a clout might get us nothing but his angry attention."

"Those spears looked mighty puny to me," Binky said.

"No punier than the guard's," I remarked. "Come on, gang. Let's move. It can't be too long till dawn, now."

The inside of the door was thatched, too. I pried a couple of the suppler leaves apart just wide enough for a peek. The broad back of our guard met my gaze. He was still rigidly holding his original stance.

"Okay, this is it," I said. "The nearest fringe of jungle is to our right when we exit. Soon's we get past the guard, that's the way we run. Got it?"

"Right," said Binky.

"Be careful, Morgan," said Lora.

Stealthily, I pressed the wood-and-thatch door open, and slipped out into the brilliant green firelight that illuminated the compound. The guard had not yet moved. I took a sidestep toward the speer-rack, and then I saw the muscles tighten across the upper part of his shoulders. An instant later, he'd spun to face me, that tusked boxer-face looking, beneath the glint of those horns, like a demon from a nightmare.

I took a step back, moving toward that rack, hoping he'd follow. He did. His double-pronged spear lowered to the horizontal, he took a step toward me.

And then Binky stepped out of the hut and, clasping his hands together, brought them at arm's-length in a vicious curve that ended directly at the base of the

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warrior's skull with a dull crunching noise.

Binky jumped back, shaking his hands up and down, and cursing under his breath. The warrior hadn't even been staggered. Instead, he turned, put a hand on Binky's chest, and shoved him backward to the ground, just at the moment when Lora came out the door.

The guard, seeing all of us loose, decided that reinforcements were in order, and he opened his mouth to yell. But by then I'd reached the racked spears, and had one hefted in my hand. Just as his head went back to sound the alarm, I flung it at him—

The slim, wobbly withe-ends struck him in the chest . . . and skidded off. The spear fell to the ground, a dud.

The moment of the impact had startled the guard. He looked down to see what it was that had struck him, and, seeing it, he glanced over and he saw me standing futilely beside the rack of these peculiarly impotent shafts.

Then the horned head went back, and the guard burst out with a sound that sounded very much like an Earth-type horse-laugh. In one of the nearby huts, someone began to stir. The whole village would be aroused if we didn't do something, fast. I grabbed the spear up from the ground.

"Run!" I yelled to Lora, who had just helped Binky to his feet. "The jungle, quick!"

I dashed past the still-chortling guard, grabbed Lora by the arm, and we took off for the distant tangle of trees.

Instantly, our guard roared something, a strange barking monosyllable that could only mean *"Halt!"* I turned my head to see what our alternative to obedience was.

The guard had this double-pronged shaft of his held at the height of his waist, the delicate tips pointed toward me. It struck me, in that instant, that it was oddly like the way a man holds a rifle, not a spear . . .

Then the guard moved the tip, up and down, faster and faster, like a man wielding a long-handled paintbrush against an invisible fence. The tips became a blur, a shimmer of whirring green . . .

"Morgan, look out!"

Lora's hurtling body caught me in the side of the ribs, and we both staggered out of the way, just as a thin crackle of white light wormed violently between those trembling wooden tips, and then a glaring white thunderbolt materialized and flew past the spot where I'd just been standing.

"Hell's bells!" I gasped, grab-

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bing Lora to me in a half-protective, half-protection-seeking embrace. "A *lightning-gun?!*"

There was no time to speculate, however, on the mystery of a primitive tribe with advanced weaponry. The guard was already vibrating that double-tip once more, and taking aim at us, a bigger target in our mutual clasp. And there were other fangfaces pouring out of huts now, all racing toward that rack. We'd be in a shower of lightning bolts in another moment.

"Well, if he can do it, so can I!" I said, pushing Lora away, and aiming the spear I'd snatched. Only I aimed it right at that rockful of other weapons. I whipped the air into a silken whimper with those tips, and then suddenly something numbing shot through me, from ankles to wrists, and even as I saw the rack explode into a July Fourth of green sparklers at the brunt of my hurled bolt, I was falling backward, every limb knotted into muscular spasms, and my shirt smoking and bursting into flame. Then the back of my head hit the ground, and I was momentarily away from it all . . .

I awoke to stinging pain, and sat up holding my head. My body was bare from the waist up, and my flesh was pink, with a few

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tiny white blisters on it. Lora was squatting beside me on the ground, looking anxious, while Binky stood guard, looking about the compound.

"Where *is* everybody?" I moaned, moving stiff arms and trying to flex some life back into my fingers.

"They've run off," Lora said. "You scared the hell out of them. I think they figure we're evil spirits, or some such thing. It seems that way."

"Just because I blasted their weapon-rack?" I asked.

"No, dopey," she said affectionately. "Because your *shirt* caught fire. Made on Earth, remember?"

"So what?" I mumbled, stupidly.

"So it burned *red*, that's what! These copper-bound people probably have never seen anything but green fire, Morgan."

"I'll be damned," I chuckled. "I guess it's a lucky thing that guy's second bolt *hit* me!"

"Morgan," Lora said, with impatience, "*that's* where his second bolt hit—"

She pointed toward the jungle behind me. I turned my head and saw a one-foot hole burnt into a triangular tree-trunk, a few feet from the hole burnt by his first miss.

"*Yipe!*" I whispered reverently. "But what the hell set me on fire, then?"

"*You* did," said Lora. "Now we know why these natives have rubber-coated forearms. Insulation. It figures that on a highly magnetic planet there's a lot of natural danger from electricity. All the local creatures must have some sort of protection against electrocution. A natural grounding system, or rubberized arms, or even absorbtive antennae as part of their metabolic cycles."

"Huh?" I said, lost, as usual.

"I mean that they either pass the electricity through themselves to the earth, or they fend it off, or they take it in and use it. Those are the only three possibilities. Which may explain the double tails on the local fauna. A sort of pickup antenna for each."

"Boy, this is a crazy place," I muttered, getting to my feet. "I wonder how this tribe ever got far enough ahead in science to make electric rifles?"

"They probably don't know beans about science," Lora said. "Any more than a caveman who could make fire with flint knew about oxidation or combustion. Don't you see that these guns are just a warlike application of a natural phenomenon? Natural, at any rate, to Crispin. Probably some prehistoric native saw a windstorm whipping tree branches about, and saw the resultant play of lightning bolts,

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so he cut one of them for himself, and—"

"You're taking the lightning part calmly enough," I remarked. "By me, that's the confusing part."

"Nothing simpler. Anytime you cut magnetic lines of force—which are plenty potent on Crispin—by a conductor, which these copper-glutted twigs are, you get an electric current. The things would be useless on Earth."

"Wow," I shook my head. "We're going to have to be plenty damn careful around here. We may destroy ourselves by just wiggling the wrong finger!"

"That's another thing," said Lora. "Binky and I have decided *not* to set off that atomic explosion, after all."

"No? Why not?" I said to Binky, still looking about.

Binky turned around. "Too much blast-wave, Mr. Blane. The wind from the blast would start the whole stinking jungle vibrating. We might just die by getting struck by lightning. And the jungle's the only place safe enough to have set the atomic engine off from. We couldn't stay on the lake shore in the open when we did it. So—" He shrugged.

"So," I sighed, "let's scout around and see if we can't find our food and canteens, and then I guess we head for the mine again."

It took us nearly an hour to locate them. They were hanging, in their knapsacks, like trophies in one of the huts, probably the chief's. Then we drank some wonderful-tasting water, munched a quick plaster-cracker, and set off toward the mountains.

It was easy, now, since I'd spotted that fishhook-shaped star cluster between myself and the arm of mountain range. We just followed the hook.

We weren't starting a new program of night-travel, but we didn't much care to stick around the village till dawn. Superstitious terror can last only so long, then it gives way to suspicious curiosity, and finally to disdain, and— We didn't want to stick around for the awakening of intellect amongst the fangfaces. That was certain.

Just in case we struck another wolfpack, I took along some of the spears as had survived my attack on the rackful of them, wrapping the shredded remnants of my shirt—torn off by Lora when it caught fire—about the hafts of them as a pretty fair insulation. I hoped.

Lora, I noticed as we trekked into the underbrush, was oddly cool in her attitude, after her relief that I was alive had faded.

"Something eating you, Lora,

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huh?" I said, as we moved cautiously through the dark bushes.

"You may as well call me 'Merrick', again," she said. "I wouldn't want you making any *more* embarrassing errors about your *'many'* girl friends!"

"What the hell are you talking about?" I demanded.

"I'm talking about Flax Dempster's lipstick, of which I found generous traces on your *shirt!*" she snapped.

"Oh, that," I said. ". . . Sure it wasn't blood?"

"I *wish* it was!" she growled. I decided to be silent till I could think of an excuse. It was a mighty quiet trip.

CHAPTER 8

MORGAN, my darling! I love you," Lora breathed, as my arms encircled her slim loveliness, trembling and joyful in a whirl of white-lace wedding dress. The perfume of her hair was an ecstasy in my nostrils as I pressed her to me.

"Kiss me," I murmured huskily.

"Take off your shoes," said Lora.

"No, first, a kiss—" I pleaded, clutching her.

She pressed her hands against my chest, and turned the side of her face toward me as I tried forcing my lips on hers. "No, no!" she cried, her dark brown eyes shut tight. "The shoes, the shoes, take them off . . . off . . . off . . ."

I sat up with a violent start, and rubbed my eyes.

The green flicker of the campfire reminded me instantly of where I still was. I looked about me. Binky was sitting on a small hillock, staring away from me into the darkness, the cloth-swathed haft of a lightning-spear in one hand. Lora lay asleep near me, one hand lying temptingly near my own. A dream. A lovely, beautiful, frustrating dream, damn it! I snorted, ruefully.

"What're you doing over there?"

I looked toward Binky. "Over where?"

He gestured, and looked frowningly intrigued.

I followed his moving finger, and saw that my bedding lay a good five feet from where I was sprawled. Was I a sleepcrawler? How the hell had I gotten over to Lora in my sleep, if not? I got up on hands and knees and scuttled back to the blanket where I belonged.

"The damnedest thing," I said to Binky, seating myself on my blanket and drawing my knees up to my chin. "I don't know *how* I got there . . ."

"I didn't hear a sound, either," Binky marvelled, nibbling at the nail of his little fin-

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ger. "You have some kind of commando training, or something?"

"Hell, no. Just plain old infantry, Binky. How I got over to Lora, I have no idea . . . What're you looking at?"

I followed his gaze, and realized for the first time that Lora, too, was even further off her blanket, in the same direction I'd been from mine. "What the hell—?" I said, then stopped, watching my legs. "Binky! Binky, look at my legs!" I was shouting.

He looked as my legs slowly moved feet-first along the blanket, until I was sitting straight-legged on the earth.

"So?" he said.

"*I* didn't move them!" I said, staring at my feet. "They went by themselves!"

"Huh!?" Binky came over quickly. "Do it again."

Obediently, I hoisted my knees to my chest, and sat waiting. Then I felt the rough surface of the blanket moving backward beneath the soles of my shoes, as my feet once more slid to the end of the bedding and off along the ground.

"Looked to *me* like you were moving them . . ." Binky said, suspiciously.

"No, honestly I— Look, you try it. Sit here, where I am." I scrambled up, and an uneasy Binky sat down carefully in my place, doubling up his legs before him as I had done.

"What—? Damnation!" he gasped, as his legs moved out before him, faster and faster, until he was straight-legged on the blanket. "That's the craziest thing I ever—"

"Ten-to-one it's this idiotic *planet* kicking up again!" I grumbled. "I'd better waken Lora; she's the physics expert in our group . . ." I turned my head. "Hey! Where's she *at!?*"

Binky and I both jumped to our feet, staring at the bare patch of blue grass where Lora had just been lying. Then, in the jungle undergrowth before our faces, there sounded a loud piteous cry of dismay.

"Morgan!"

It was Lora's voice.

Binky and I plunged into the bushes, racing crazily into the darkness to find her. I heard her voice up ahead of me, calling my name over and over.

"Coming!" I panted, dashing along. "Hang on, honey, I'm coming!"

Then I nearly stumbled over her on the earth. She was following my suggestion admirably. She was hanging on, all right, to the base of a sapling, her legs stretched out on the earth in the direction she'd been going.

"What is it?" I said, stooping down.

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Then I sprawled flat on my face as a sensation hit my feet, not unlike having a rug jerked from under them. I caught tight hold of Lora to keep from being dragged away, just as Binky crashed out of the bushes, tried to pause, and was knocked flat in the same manner.

"Hey!" he cried, and then, before my horrified eyes, he started sliding feet-first along the ground, too far away for me to grab him. I watched, mute with fascination, until he arrested his rearward progress by grabbing at the knotted stem of a thornbush beside his path of departure.

"What's happening, Lora!?" I said.

"Shoes . . ." she gasped, hanging on for the two of us. "Kick off your shoes!"

It was startling to hear the very words of my dream thrown at me so sudden-like, but all at once I understood the reason for that subconscious dialogue I'd undergone. My body had felt that tugging at my feet, and had translated it into dream-plot for me. I began at once to pry at the counter of one shoe with the toe of the other, until I could kick it off. When I did so, it leaped away from the stockinged foot like something dropped from a great height, only sideways, and then vanished into the bushes beyond Binky.

"Magnetism!" I cried. "We're near a natural magnet of some kind . . . But why the shoes? I thought these were special non-magnetic ones, for use on a Lectralift . . ."

"They *are*," said Lora, who was busy kicking off her own footwear. "I don't understand it at all. The nails in the soles are supposed to be highly resistant to magnetism. This would . . . have to . . . Uh! There they go! . . . would have to be an enormously powerful one," she finished, as her shoes fled by themselves, and she hung on until I finally pried the other one of mine free and away.

In our stocking feet, we went over and helped Binky get rid of his. Then we got to our feet and brushed some of the dirt out of our clothes. I was beginning to feel pretty primitive, what with no shirt and now no shoes. Then I had a terrible thought.

"The canteens! They're non-magnetic, too, but—?"

As one person, the three of us dashed back through the gloom to our campsite and looked. The tree-branch on which Binky had hung our gear was empty of everything but a few swaying remnants of carrying-straps. The terrific tugging had pulled away the canteens, and the assault packs, with their canned goods.

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"Great!" I groaned, sitting down on the ground. "No food, no water, and a few weapons that may very well kill *us* when we try to use them!"

"We'll have to hope we find something edible, that's all," said Lora.

"That's *all!?*" I snarled. "That's *plenty!*"

"I didn't mean it in that sense," she said stiffly. "I meant that's all there's *left*, not that's all there's *to it!*"

"Lora," said Binky, "I think he's asking you to paste him one . . ."

"You *would* remember that!" I muttered at him. Then I looked at Lora. "Is my crabbing unreasonable, honey?"

She looked into my eyes, then sank down beside me. "No, I guess not. Not under the circumstances. And I haven't exactly been pleasant to you since our escape early yesterday morning, have I!"

"Like camping out with a gorgon!" I said, but not very earnestly. Lora leaned forward on her hands, and brushed her lips lightly upon mine, then sat back.

"That was an apology," she explained.

I rubbed my hands together and grinned at her. "Seems to me," I said, leaning toward her, "I have *lots* of things to apologize for . . ."

". . . Morgan . . ." she said, anxiously, but she didn't make a move to retreat. I took hold of her by the shoulders and planted a nice one, right on target.

"There!" I said, sitting back, "in the future, I want all your apologies to be like that one."

"I hope you don't mind," Binky said, "if I settle for a handshake?"

"Even if you apologize to *me?*" said Lora.

""Well, that'd make a difference, all right," Binky grinned. "Look, Mr. Blane," he added, more seriously, "it's almost dawn now, and we're all up; why don't we take off down the way we were just heading, long as it's in the direction we are going. Maybe the stuff's been stopped by a tangle of trees or something, and we can still get something to eat and drink."

"Good idea," I said, getting up. "Looks like all we have to carry is the blankets and spears."

"See, there *is* a bright side," said Lora, bending over to get her blanket. "And the spears'll serve as hike-staffs."

I brought down the palm of my hand where it'd do the most good. "Don't be sarcastic," I said, as she jumped up and clasped both hands to the injured section.

"My hour of revenge will come," she said ominously. "Just

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don't dare walk in front of me, that's all, boy!"

We started off for the mountains, with me bringing up the rear . . .

We came upon the foothills of the range in less than an hour, at which point we found the remains of most of our equipment. One of the canteens was dented but unsmashed, as it lay weirdly on the side of a black hunk of that magnetic rock, but try as we might, we couldn't even pry it loose with the three of us tugging at it. Finally, we were able to turn it enough on its own axis so that the neck pointed downwards, and were thus able to drink, using a thumb-on-the-hole method of withholding the precious liquid for each libation. We finished it off amongst us, since there was no way of bringing it along. From the canned goods we were able to get at a few of those thick dry wafers from those tins which were split by the impact, but we had to leave the others, since even the tiny two-inch can-opener provided with the kits was immovable against the rough black rock.

Thirst slaked, but slightly underfed, we began a painful barefooted climb up the raw rock face of the slope. (Lora had insisted that we save the socks for night wear; they were no good for walking in, but they might keep our feet warm at what promised to be alpine temperatures.)

In an hour, we'd arisen barely one hundred feet above the straggling fingers of blue-and-red jungle that partially invaded the lower slopes of the range. And above that spot, the mountain wall was nearly vertical. We sat down, panting, on a sharp-edged projection of rock, and each nibbled moodily at a single dry cracker. Among us, we now had five left.

"Well, little heiress," I said, waving an arm in a slow sweeping curve from left to right, "there is your domain. I hope you're satisfied."

"The first thing I shall do after my coronation," said Lora, "is to have those dog-faced sharecroppers either file down their horns, or wear suitable pads upon them. I can't have my subjects gouging one another. It wouldn't be practical."

"And you might pass a decree about the water," I added.

"My first legal act shall be a law stating that no copper shall dissolve into, or otherwise pollute, the flowing streams of Crispin . . ." she said, then halted, swallowing.

I patted her shoulder. "I know. I'm a little blotter-throated myself. Let's not think about water for awhile."

It was a bad statement, psy-

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chologically. I immediately could think of nothing else.

"Well," said Binky, flicking a crumb or two from his lips, then dusting his palms off against one another, "we may as well start up again. We'll be needing a flat space to shelter on at nightfall."

"And if sunset catches us on a vertical section?" I asked, helping Lora regain her feet on the stone.

"Then we pray and keep climbing," said Binky.

"I hope that snow we saw at the top isn't riddled with more cupric pollution," I sighed, letting him take the lead so that Lora was between us.

"It shouldn't be," Lora said. "In the distillative process, even the most persistent solvents are usually left behind as crystallized—"

"Oh, climb, girl, climb," I muttered.

Three hours later, we were barely twice as high as our last stop, but there was a wide ledge there, so we sank gratefully down upon it, and tried to catch our breaths.

From our new vantage point, I could see the other arm of the range, a dim bluer-than-sky haze on the horizon. We were on, we figured, the southwest part of the "X," so that had to be the northwest angle.

"Funny," I said, "the way these ranges are shaped. Of course, even from space, they're not perfectly *true* Xes, but near enough to make you wonder."

"On this planet, nothing would surprise me," said Lora. "It may be something to do with magnetism, or electricity, or even the crystalline shape of certain copper crystals . . ."

"Or a fantastic coincidence," said Binky. "Like the way the western continental outline of Europe and Africa almost duplicates the eastern continental outline of the Americas. As if the two of them were touching once, and split away."

"We'll probably never know," Lora sighed, and leaned her head against my shoulder tiredly, the long brown hair tangled and matted from the harrowing nature of our jungle journeying. I started to absently pluck a tiny piece of stiff twig out of her tresses, then stopped, listening.

"What's that!?" I said.

Binky and Lora sat up, instantly alert.

We all heard it. A dim, distant sigh of sound, like the noise made by the perpetually moving waves on a midnight beach.

"I think—" said Lora, then she pointed, excitedly, down toward the jungle at the far horizon. *"Look!"*

The blue-and-red growths were moving. We couldn't see the individual leaves, of course,

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but there was a color-shift as light-and-dark masses of these growths moved up and down, stirred by some unseen, unfelt force. Then, as this heaving, billowing motion spread across the treetops toward us, the sighing grew louder in my ears, and became a roar, a roar I finally recognized . . .

"Windstorm!" I cried, clambering to my feet. "Good grief! Will you *look* at that!"

At the far edge of jungle, the part caught most strongly in the growing motion of air, tiny sparks became visible. And what was a spark at that distance was something I wouldn't like to be close to. As the wind grew across the treetops, the thin line of sparkling electric discharges followed, coming closer and closer to where we stood.

"Do you think there's any danger?" I said to Lora.

She clung to my arm, gazing raptly at that beautiful growth of fierce energy. "I— I don't know," she said. "We should be safe up here, unless . . ."

"Unless—?"

"Unless the lightning is as affected by the magnetic field as our metal objects were . . ." she quavered.

"Oh, fine!" I moaned, shaking my head. "The day the forest has shooting practice, we decide to climb up on the damned *target!*"

"Better here than down there!" Binky hollered over the growing gale. I followed his gaze to the jungle, and saw what he meant. Trees, struck by other trees' discharges, were exploding into flaming green sparks, and their flying branches, even in near-death, were still vibrating and sending out flaming white thunderbolts of their own. Within a few minutes, all traces of blue-and-red were gone, hidden by a veritable canopy of raw lightning, that flared with blinding whiteness everywhere below us except the final fringe of forest down below the fall of the cliff. And then the wind, which began to pelt us with body-jolting blows, got even that final area to the vibratory point of electrical discharge.

Then the world went mad.

Searing snakes of lightning sprang toward the black rock below us, and struck like artillery shells. And then, the rock, split into boulders, started to topple, and—

Flew away *across* the jungle!

"The magnetic potential!" Lora cried, in my arms. "The lightning bolts are changing the potential of the rock when they hit it, and it's being *repelled* by the mountain!"

We'd given up hope of standing, and now the three of us lay flat on our bellies, watching the

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scene that was so unnervingly like an Apocalyptic end-of-the-world phase.

"Looks to me," said Binky, his voice a faint cry in the mingled sound of lightning, wind, and shattering rock, "like some of it's coming back for more . . ."

I looked out toward where the boulders were still flying, like an earth-bound asteroid swarm, and saw to my horror that a similar swarm was hurtling toward them from the opposite direction. "They reverse again?" I said, into Lora's ear, half-covering her tiny form with my body.

"I don't think so, Morgan . . . I think *those* stones are coming from the *other* arm of this range. The wind must be blowing over there, too— *Oh!*"

I had to keep from crying out, myself, at the sight she and I had just seen. The flying stones and boulders had met others in mid-flight above the jungle, and there was a smashing, crashing and sundering in mid-air that staggered my mind. It ended in an instant, then the shreds were falling horizontally back toward us, while other shreds headed for the farther arm of the X-shaped range.

And all the while, the canopy of lightning bloomed and hissed like a white bag full of vipers over the nearby jungle. All we could do was lie, cling and pray . . . I had a small inkling now of how the ranges had gotten their shapes, what with this electro-magnetic interplay of rock.

Now and then, a more ambitious bolt came up near where we cowered, and blasted off a section of cliffside. I could imagine us flying off into the air, riding one of those juggernauts to aerial destruction above the jungle floor— Or, avoiding that, smashing to death on that other range . . .

And then, quickly as it had come, it ended.

The distant electric flickerings died away, the wind became a sigh, a whisper, silence. The last jagged stab of lightning flared briefly against the mountainside, and the last few tiny pebbles spun giddily away to their destiny on the far range.

Shakily, we got to our feet. Lora, strangely enough, was smiling. I had a dim memory of some rather paternal affectionate kissing I'd indulged in while I held her, but it had been— I assured myself—solely to keep her spirits up. "You—uh—you okay?" I asked awkwardly.

She just nodded, and took my hand.

I looked at Binky, eager to change the subject. "What do you think? Can we make the top before sunset?"

Instead of answering, he con-

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tinued to stare down below, at the ragged, smoking mat of jungle, and the raw, gouged places, in the cliffside. Then he turned to Lora.

"I was just wondering—" he said softly.

"Wondering what, Binky?" she asked, curiously.

He grinned, and shook his head ruefully. "Tell me, just what did your old grandfather have against you?"

CHAPTER 9

WE HAD to spend a night on the mountainside, but we had a good-sized plateau for it, so it wasn't as bad as we'd feared. On the way, we caught sight of some birds, but they kept carefully away from our route, so I wasn't able to detect much detail. Except that all were bright crimson, from tail to beak, and the tail was split into two trailing scarlet plumes that didn't seem to impede their flight any.

And there were goatlike creatures on the crags, too. Though, since I'm no biologist, they may not have been goatlike at all. But the shaggy fur and horns made them seem as goatish as I could remember our Earth-animals to have been. The stubby tails, of course, were two-tipped.

Binky managed to bring one of them down with his spear-blaster, or whatever it was, and we threw cupric caution to the winds—which were not, luckily, blowing—and roasted the flesh as best we could on a spit made from another spear, over a fire made from the third one. It was mostly an alternate of raw meat and charred meat, but we ate it anyhow, and to hell with cupric poisoning.

No reactions set in after dinner, so we set out again, with me wrapping my half-naked torso in a still-damp untanned pelt of this creature. Wool-side in, of course. The others, though I can't be certain it was due to the pelt-odor, made wonderful time keeping ahead of me on the climb.

When we got to the snow, we didn't bother trying to melt it; we just grabbed up handfuls of the wet, sticky stuff, and chewed ourselves a drink. It tasted swell.

I sat on a rock, shivering, my bare feet momentarily encased in my socks, and held clear of the sharp, icy surface we'd been climbing. The goatmeat was coldly unappetizing, and the last military cracker had long since been wolfed dryly down. I couldn't help but wonder how I was to survive a barefoot trudge uphill through the snow that covered the mountainside above us, whose lower edge we had just reached.

Lora sat on another rock,

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yogi-fashion, with her legs folded neatly so that each bare foot rested snugly in the bend of each knee. I'd have done it, too, only I could never achieve that position. Not without cracking a tendon. I was busy being extremely jealous of her flexibility when Binky, who'd gone scouting around for maybe another goat, came clambering back toward us around a curve of cliffside.

"There's a pass!" he called excitedly. "We won't have to go over the top . . ."

". . . Oh!" said Lora, with almost a disappointed sigh.

"For Pete's sake, lady!" I grumbled. "We weren't trying to plant a flag on the peak, you know. This was an attempt to get *beyond* the range, not *atop* it, remember?"

"Seems a shame, though, with it so close and all," she said, unfolding her legs with a fluid grace that kindled frustrated rage in my own.

Gingerly, I set my feet, still stockinged, down on the bare rock. "I don't care what you say, Lora. From here on, as long as these things last, I go with my socks on!"

"Maybe we all could," said Lora. "It may not be as hard climbing down. We can sort of sit-and-slide, possibly, bit by bit."

"Oh, no, we won't," I said. "I've lost a shirt, then my shoes, and pretty soon my socks, but I absolutely refuse to arrive at the mine with the trouser seat sheared off my—"

"Morgan!" said Lora.

"—bottom," I finished, stubbornly. "What did you think I was going to say?"

"Never mind," she said, and turned away, but I caught the flicker of a smile fighting to get onto her lips.

"What's the difference whether I say it, or you think it?" I asked, but she didn't answer, merely rolled her blanket, shouldered it, and made ready to leave. By common consent, Binky and I let her tote the sole remaining spear-thing, as a staff. In theory, she was the weaker sex, and needed it. I could have given her an argument on that, what with her agile limbs, and effortless output of energy. She was frisking at points where I was dead on my feet.

Wearily, I rolled my own blanket, slipped into my stinking animal-skin shirt, and followed trudgingly after her dancing feet as she moved along after Binky.

They'd suggested earlier that I might cut myself a less putrid garment out of my blanket, but cutting a headhole and wearing it poncho-fashion was awkward when climbing, with the perilous likelihood of stepping on the

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trailing front end and jerking your head against the cliff-face when you tried to straighten up, and cut it down to size I would not, asserting my rights to have an equal complement of bedding when the cool night fell. Of course, there was the alternative of sharing one of theirs, but Binky was too big, and Lora was too adamantly unwilling. So I walked in the rear and stank.

The path Binky had located through the pass was narrow, but at least level, so we made good time moving through it. Within four hours, we were on the other side of the range, looking down on a shimmering golden expanse of hot, glittering, waterless land. A dessert. From the black foothills of the mountain ranges to the distant horizon, nothing moved, nothing stirred but the heat-disturbed air. The sky was kiln-blue turquoise over a planet-face of dazzling brass—

Brass . . . ?

"Holy jumping Geronimo!" I cried, grabbing Lora into my arms. "*That's* the mine! The whole damned desert is made of copper!"

"But," she said, bewildered, "the map only showed a small point on it, marked 'Entrance to Mine'. I remember it clearly, Morgan . . ." She squinted in the sunlight, then shaded her eyes and peered down the slope toward the far-off foothills. "It was somewhere just about— *There!*" she cried triumphantly, and pointed.

I narrowed my eyes against the golden dazzle below, and tried to ascertain the locale of this thing she was trying to indicate, a sloppy approach to pinpointing when one is waggling the fingertip in ecstasy. "Hold that thing still, will you!" I growled, then at the same moment saw the square black object, barely bigger than a pinprick in that monstrous golden fabric of desert, almost nestled against the hills themselves. "You're crazy," I said uncertainly. "But let's go down and see, anyhow."

"Before we do," said Lora, pulling back from my embrace, "I have a request to make. Something must go, immediately."

"What?" I said.

"You have a choice," she grinned. "Me, or that goatskin. Simple as that."

"It *was* getting pretty gamy, at that. I shrugged the stiff, odorous hide from my shoulders, and flexed my arms. "Okay, but if I die of sunburn, you're a murderess."

We scouted around, found a likely slope, and started a careful climb downward. I noticed that, however I tried keeping up with Binky and Lora, they al-

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ways managed to stay ten feet or more below me.

"I got rid of the goatskin, remember?" I called down, after about half an hour of this.

"I know," Binky grinned back, "but the memory clings."

"You'd better take a shower when we get down," suggested Lora.

"In what, *copper?*" I snarled.

For answer, she pointed over to our left. I followed that finger, and saw what I hadn't noticed before. A thin column of silver shivered in the air alongside a distant cliff-face, turning to white clouds of spray at the base. Grandfather Merrick not only found himself a mine, but a waterhole for the miners.

"I hope it's not poison, too," I shouted at the top of Lora's head.

"It won't matter," she called back. "There'll be some kind of equipment near the mine, I think, and we can rig up a small water distillery if necessary."

"What about on my skin, though?" I yelled.

"If it's copper sulphate, it won't hurt a bit. In fact, such solutions are notoriously detrimental to the life of bacteria which cause offensive odors, and—"

"*Climb!*" I growled.

At about a hundred feet from the desert floor, we all paused to rest in the shade of an outcropping of black rock, eyeing that distant cataract with parched lips and sun-stung bodies. Despite the warmth, I had covered my shoulders and arms with my blanket, to keep off those skin-blistering yellow rays. At the moment, I felt like an any-minute-now case of heat exhaustion.

"That," I croaked, pointing toward what had been Lora's 'mine entrance,' down almost directly below our feet, "that doesn't look like no adit to me."

"Seems to be a shack," Binky observed, his voice raw and hoarse from the heat.

"Maybe," Lora said weakly, leaning her sun-pinkened face near to the cool shaded rock wall that supported our backs, "maybe my grandfather put the entrance inside . . . Wouldn't blame him . . . in this awful heat . . ."

"Maybe," Lora said weakly,

"I still think you're nuts," I said. "That whole desert there is copper. I recognize it."

"When'd *you* ever see copper? . . ." Lora asked.

"I'm a millionaire, remember?" I granted. "We sometimes have to break a nickel for the subway gum machines, you know."

"Oh, yeah, pennies. I forgot," she sighed, wearily. Her feet and body were hardly twinkling with energy now, I observed, but I didn't feel at all the satisfaction

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I should have. Instead, I was getting scared.

"You— You sure you can make it the rest of the way down, Lora?" I said, earnestly.

"Sure," she said, touching lightly upon my face with her fingertips. "As long as you're along, Morgan."

"You . . ." I said, trying weakly to joke, "you just love me for my money . . ."

She smiled gently, then nodded her head toward the vast expanse of burning orange-yellow desert. "And what about my almost-a-billion that I can sell this to the government for, assuming Barton's estimate was correct?"

"Oh, that . . . You mean you'll be rich, too? Well, in that case—" I turned my head, and looked into her dark brown eyes, inches from my own. "—In that case, maybe I could love you for yours, huh?"

Her face was suddenly serious, anxious. "And if the mine's a dud, Morgan? If all that desert is just sand?"

"Maybe—" I began, trying to wet dry lips with an almost-dryer tongue, "maybe I could love you anyway, Lora . . ."

"Morgan, I do love you," she said softly, watching me.

I slid an arm about her shoulders, and pulled her to me, gently. "And I love you, Lora," I said, and kissed her. Her lips were cracked, and so were mine, but I can't remember a more blissful encounter of same.

"And if he goes back on ya," Binky whispered, "I'll break every bone in his body, Miss."

"If I go back on her," I said, "you have my permission to do just that."

"Well," said Binky, "let's try to make the rest of the way, now. It's all downhill, anyhow, and not too steep to take quick-like, if we're—"

I looked at him. "What's up, Bink? Why'd you stop?"

"Oh, no," he said, his tone deep and woeful. "Aw, *no!* Not after all our trouble!"

I turned my head, slowly due to numerous stiff red sunburnt spots on my neck, and looked.

Settling gently down onto the desert floor beside the shack was a winged vehicle. A Flicker, working perfectly. And as I watched, the glassite dome flipped open, and three tightly-wedged people crawled out. Two men and a woman. I couldn't see the men from where I was, not that clearly. But one detail of the trio was unmistakeable. The woman had red hair.

"I'll kill 'em!" Binky rasped. "I'll drop a rock on 'em, I'll set the damned shack on fire—"

"Easy, Binky," I said. "Don't strain yourself. The thing for us to do is get down there before they can gum things up. If we

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destroyed the shack, we might blot out evidence that we'd need ourselves."

"Besides—" Lora said, with a ghost of her usual smile, "the magnetic potential of this mountain prevents any of the rocks from being pried from its surface . . ."

"Shut up, darling," I said. "We're going to climb again. Come on, I'll help you."

A gruelling half-hour later, we were standing on the floor of the desert, a hundred yards from the shack and that Flicker. I felt weak, woozy, drained of strength. But the shade, with the sun already past its zenith, was cooling and restful on the eastern side of the range. The crawling shadow of the range was already past the shack, and moving out into that vast, glowing desert.

I stooped down and picked up a pinch of the golden grain stuff and touched it to my tongue. I got that bitter-salty taste that I'd first learned of as a child.

"It's copper, Lora, or I don't know the flavor of pennies when I lick them," I said.

"Swell," said Binky. "Now, look, here's what we do. We get into that Flicker, all of us, and blast off for Radnor. When we get there, we—"

"We what?" I said. "Sick the military onto our friends? They haven't committed any planetary crime, which is all that the Space Force would care about. And the fraud they're undertaking we have no way of proving."

Binky's fertile imagination was not stopped, however. "Okay, so we take the Flicker and just *go* to Radnor. We don't tell anybody *anything*, not even those chumps are *here*, get it?"

"Binky, I'm ashamed of you," I grinned, "although I am perfectly in sympathy with your emotions. Nope, let's get on over there and— Make it, Lora?"

"Mm-hmm," she nodded. "A good glass of water'll fix up my trouble . . . Or maybe two."

"Come on, then," I said.

Together, Binky and I helped her over the cooling copper "sand" to the door of the shack. Just as we reached it, it opened, and Maximilian Barton looked out at us.

"Thought I recognized you through the window," he nodded. "Come on in. Miss Dempster is famous for her hospitality."

I didn't miss the connotations of that statement, not for a minute. "You talk as if she owns this place . . ."

Barton stepped back, to let us enter.

"She does, Mr. Blane," he smiled. "Oh, there *were* some rather puzzling signs about the place that would give one suspicions to the contrary, but—

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As you can see, we thought we might need some kindling . . ."

As we got into the comparative gloom of the shack, I saw the other man—a stranger, probably Max's pilot—just finishing rending some bits of wood and stuff into bits with a short-handled axe. He was sweating hard, which seemed odd for a man of his build, even in a desert.

And then I knew what was bugging him. The axe. He must have carried it in. And, not too damned far away, the black magnetic mountain was exerting its steady, enormous tug. I had a funny thought, then, but Max interrupted my thinking.

"So you see, this place belongs solely to Flax, now."

I looked toward Flax. There was a soft smile on her lips, and her eyes were half-lidded, like those of a well-fed contented cat, though even greener.

"Congratulations," I muttered, as I helped Lora, almost a dead weight, into a chair. "Might I trouble you for some water for the lady?"

"Fraser—" Flax said to the big pilot, nodding.

He took a canteen from a sling at his hip, and held the mouth of it to Lora's lips. He seemed to be gripping it extra hard, which brought back my other thought in a hurry.

"Max, look, before we start discussing the pros and cons of ownership, I should tell you—"

"You may call me *Mis-ter* Barton, if you don't mind," said Max. "Your exalted financial position hardly gives you the right to take pepole's names and shorten them—"

"Max, for Pete's sake—" I growled, stepping toward him.

"Hold it!" said Flax, whipping up one of my stolen pistols from a kit-bag on the floor.

"Look out!" I yelled, yanking Lora and chair and all out of the way.

The gun went off with a loud *"Blam!"*, ear-splitting in that small room, and Flax screamed in terror and dropped it.

"It jumped!" she cried, then gasped as the pistol slid swiftly along the floor and crashed up against the wall.

"What the devil—?" Max said, white-faced.

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, *fathead!*" I snapped. "That whole mountain range back there is *magnetic*, and if you or we ever want to see Radnor or Earth again, you'd better run like hell outside and peg down that *Flicker!*"

All quarrels momentarily forgotten, Max, Binky, Fraser the pilot and myself all dashed outside to save the ship. Where it had been was a shallow trench in the copper-sand. I turned my eyes to follow this smooth-walled

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gouge, made by the dragging belly of the Flicker, toward the side of the mountain.

And *there* was the Flicker! I looked a little to the left. And *there* was the Flicker! And there, and there, and there . . . I turned to Max, bitterly.

"How are you at jigsaw puzzles?" I muttered.

CHAPTER 10

WE FILED back inside the shack, silently. Lora and Flax were watching us, their faces anxious.

"Our ticket to Radnor is now umpteen billion chunks on the cliff wall," I said, plopping down to a tired squat beside Lora's chair. "I'm open to suggestions."

Lora laid her hand on my shoulder, and let it linger there. Flax caught the gesture, and her already-green eyes glowed greener than a Crispin campfire.

"Maybe," she smiled sweetly at Lora, "my hospitality will wear thin."

"And maybe," I grunted, reaching up and replacing Lora's hand, which had risen an inch from my shoulder, "my patience will do the same."

"We still have the pistols," said Flax, sullenly.

"Oh, dry up," I said. "You can unhitch your corset and drop the *femme fatale* impersonations. This is serious stuff, you know. If someone doesn't come by looking for us, we're cooked—" I remembered the blistering heat outside. "Sorry."

"But," Max said, licking his lips and sinking down onto a lightweight plastic bench, "we can't just *sit* here . . ."

"We can *pace*," Binky offered, with a wan smile.

"Could— Could I have a little of that water again?" Lora asked, in the ensuing silence. She knew it was a touchy request.

I looked up at Fraser, Max's pilot. "Can she?" I said.

He looked at Flax. She shrugged and turned away. Fraser came over and uncapped the canteen once more, holding it while Lora drank.

"Hey—" said Max, suddenly. "That's not the only canteen, is it?"

We all stared at Fraser. He swallowed, carefully, then blinked his eyes and said, "There was one more of 'm but it was in th' Flicker . . ."

"Don't worry," I said, seeing the anxious panic flash across Max's face. "There's a whole cataract of water about a two-mile hike down the cliff-face. Of course, it may be poisonous, but we can always distill it."

"But isn't that a long and tedious process?" he demanded.

"What's our hurry?" I shrugged. "We have nothing *but* time. I don't suppose one of you jok-

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ers brought a ham sandwich to this galactic picnic?"

Everybody looked at Fraser again. He flushed scarlet.

"There were some rations, but they was in the—"

"Flicker," Max nodded, miserably.

We sat a moment longer, then I said, "Say, tell me, Max, how did you three get a Flicker to *work* up on Crispin, anyhow? And how'd you meet up with Flax, who was last seen sneaking off into the woods with stolen property? And what took you so long to get here, with transportation like that?"

"Anything *else?*" Max said, with cold civility.

"Sure. How'd Frazer here ever get a pilot's license?"

"It was easy!" said Fraser, happily. "I got a perfect mechanical appetite. That means I can figure anything long as it's s'posed t' *do* something! And I got a natural sense of good balance, and I got automatic response to vehicle stress, and I got perfect coordinature."

"And you went out to join the Space Force?" I marvelled.

He stared, then grinned. "Oh, yeah," he said, snapping his fingers happily. "And I got drafted."

"That solves that," I said, then turned to Max. "So how about you?"

Max sighed and gave in. "Okay, we may as well trade stories as anything. It was simple enough. As soon as we got near Crispin, Fraser felt the force of the magnetic field affecting the Flicker. Don't ask me how: He's got extrasensory fingertips, or something. So he turned off the drive, and glided us in."

"Without," Flax said bitterly, "radioing the information to *our* ship, which dived blithely downward until the engine melted! Just like that!"

"Fraser couldn't think of *everything*, Flax," said her lawyer. "As far as I was concerned, his instantaneous action was commendable." He turned back to me. "But to continue— We landed with no damage, but he told me that he'd have to fix the engine to function on this planet. He couldn't tell me what was wrong, in scientific terms, but he *did* say that— What was it you said, Fraser?"

Fraser beamed, glad to be the center of attention.

"I said that the stuff what went round in the wires to give the push to the stuff in the fuel tank was getting bollixed by some other stuff on this place here that was pushing it the wrong way, so I had to pull a couple of wires and rig the Flicker to work without no power going into the wires except

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what it got anyhow from the planet, see?"

"That's what he said, all right," Max smiled.

"You mean he fixed the Flicker to work *from* the magnetic forces on Crispin instead of being burnt up by working *against* them!" I said. I caught Lora's admiring glance and flushed.

"Why, Morgan," she said softly, "you're learning!"

I grinned at her. "If *Fraser* can learn electronics, I'm going to have to learn it, too, or never hold my head up in public again."

"Aw, I didn't learn it. I got a gift," Fraser said.

"Yeah," said Flax. "One brain, minus instructions."

Fraser gave her a hurt look.

"So go on, Max," I said. "He fixed it. Then what? Why didn't you come here?"

"Because by then Fraser thought to radio to Flax's ship, to see if they'd made it. When they didn't answer, he got worried, so we took the Flicker up and started looking for wreckage. We found it, and landed, but there was no sign of either of them. Well, we couldn't just *leave*, after all, not without knowing."

"Why, Max," I said, with real surprise, "I never would have thought it of you."

"Don't pin a medal on him, yet, Morgan," said Flax, her words like razor-edged glass. "After all, how would it look if a lawyer handles an inheritance for a woman, gets her to sign him a power of attorney over her fortune, and then, in the course of taking her to examine her property, comes back without her? . . ."

"Oh—" I said. Max studiously avoided meeting Flax's eyes, and she never let off boring with them at the back of his perspiring neck.

"S-So," he went on, trying to discount her statement by ignoring it, "we took a look around. We found Ansel's parachute next. He'd been—uh—"

"If Ansel is Flax's pilot, skip this part. I not only found the parachute, I was there just after he'd been dragged out of it. Go ahead from there, Max. We're right with you."

"By then, Fraser was getting tired, so we landed, and got some sleep. Meantime, Flax, who was somewhere in that woods, had seen us flying overhead. She moved off in the direction we'd taken past her point of view, hoping to get to an open area where she might signal if we came down again, and—"

"And I damned near broke my shin over a wing of their Flicker in the dark!" said Flax. "And do you know that those guys didn't want to *take* me?"

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"Not take you?" I said. "Then why *find* you?"

"Not that *trip*, that's all," said Max, brushing a drop of sweat from his forehead. "The Flickers are only supposed to seat two people, you know. It might have been dangerous traveling with three. My intention was to have Fraser fly me here, then go back for her, and—"

"*Ha!*" said Flax.

"We were going to leave her food, and weapons, of course," Max smiled placatingly at her. It didn't work.

"Sure you were," she spat. "And in the meantime, you'd scoot around the shack here, while Old Fuzzbrain was winging back for me, and you'd make the wonderful discovery that it was *your* old grandfather that founded the Crispin Copper Mines!" She turned a baleful gaze from him to me. "Do you know that this crummy—"

"Ah-ah!" I said. "Don't forget: Fraser's here."

Her lips worked violently, but she shifted into a more genteel gear and went on, "This louse didn't even want me to leave *Earth* with him! Wouldn't let me see my own mine!"

"*Whose* mine!?" Lora exploded, but I grabbed her wrist just short of a tigerish spring at Flax.

"Easy," I said. "Let her tell it with her plot and motivations. We can always edit the final script."

"With parched, sunburnt fingers," Binky sighed. "Damn it, Mr. Blane, I'm so dry inside I could get relief licking a roll of dental floss!"

"If you have an extra, I'll join you," I said. Then I got to my feet. "Binky's right. Before we tell any more war stories about Crispin, we'd better go out and get some of that water before our corpuscles have to turn edgewise and *roll* through our veins."

"Well, who should go?" Max asked, looking around.

We stared at one another. I wasn't about to take off and leave Max to destroy any evidence he may have missed . . . Max wouldn't leave me alone to find it. For reasons of employment, Fraser and Binky couldn't be left, either of them, nor, for reasons of financial situations, could Lora and Flax. Of course, we could leave one person from one team, and one from another . . . But I didn't trust Flax and Lora not to scrap, and Lora wasn't exactly in top shape . . . Fraser could, in a pinch, destroy Binky with one hand. And if Max and I stayed, I couldn't guarantee peace, either. Besides which, our staying would have the end result of either having the women and our pilots carrying enough water for six people,

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which wasn't fair to the women, or if Max and I kept the women with us, then we'd have the same fight-problem between Binky and Fraser out at the cataract . . . .

My head started to spin, so I gave it up. "Maybe," I said softly, "we had *all* better go."

"Morgan," Lora said softly, "we may as well sit here."

"Why?" I asked, looking down at her, her face bloodless beneath the pink splotches of sunburn.

"Because," she smiled sadly, "we don't have anything to carry the water back in . . ."

"The canteen—" Max blurted, then stopped, recalling that the cataract fell down the side of the damnably magnetic mountain. It'd get to the cataract before *we* did, and it wouldn't be coming back.

"Old man Merrick must've had *something* to carry water in!" I argued. "He couldn't just sit here and dessicate!"

"He had something," said Flax, with a scornful smile at her lawyer. "A nice one-gallon earthenware jug."

"Swell," I said. "Where's it at?"

She jerked a thumb at the floor. I looked. Amongst the splinters of the signboard Fraser had been chopping when we'd entered, I detected shards of pottery.

"*Why*, Max!" I groaned. "For Pete's sake, why?"

"It—" he murmured, much subdued, "it had his name-painted on the side . . ."

"Then you *admit* this place is Lora's!" I yelled in triumph.

Max stepped back, startled. "I didn't— I mean— I didn't mean to imply that it was *her* grandfather's name . . ."

"Whose else's? Flax's? Yours? And if so, why the carnage?"

Max sat down, angry, now. "You'll never prove it in court. You have three witnesses, I have three witnesses."

"Don't count too hard on *me*, honey," said Flax.

"You're just as involved as I am—" he said furiously.

"Let's not forget one thing, huh?" Binky interrupted groaningly. "If we don't get some water, we never even *get* to court!"

"He's right," said Lora. "Maybe— Maybe the only thing for us to do is to all go over to the cataract and drink, as much as we can hold."

"Then sweat it out hiking back," Flax muttered. "And if we get thirsty in the middle of the night, we can slip into our bunny-fur sandals and skip two miles to the waterfall! No, thank you."

"*I* know!" said Fraser, startling all of us. "How come we

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don't just go to the water and *stay* there?"

"Out of the mouths of boobs," said Flax. "Why don't we?"

After a few seconds' thought, and feeling very foolish, I admitted I didn't know any reason why not. We all began gathering our gear together for the trip. Lora, however, was worried.

"Morgan," she said, leaning close to me and whispering, as I made a pack out of my blanket with some cords I'd found, "there's just one thing: Why didn't my *grandfather* put this shack nearer the cataract? It would have been tough on *him* being this far, wouldn't it? It doesn't make sense."

I paused, thinking. "Maybe the noise bothered him? Those cataracts don't *tiptoe* down cliffsides, you know . . ."

"Perhaps you're right," she said, the frown leaving her face. "Maybe he just couldn't sleep nights."

She turned away just before her worried frown reappeared, this time on *my* face. Why *hadn't* old Merrick camped nearer? However, I was too thirsty by then to think it out. Whatever the reason was, if Merrick had found it out and survived, then we should be able to.

It was only when we were all halfway to the cataract that I remembered one tiny detail: Old Merrick *hadn't* survived . . .

CHAPTER 11

SAY, what if the water's poisonous?" Max asked, as we got nearer to the thundering column of falling water. "We can't bring distilling apparatus out here: The mountain'll snatch it up!"

"If it's poisonous, we may as well go ahead and drink it," Flax murmured. "It'll be quicker than death by thirst."

"Hey, I don't wanna drink no poison!" Fraser complained.

"Why not?" Flax said with a shrug. "Socrates did."

"But he had brains," I pointed out.

"Ain't *I* got brains?" Fraser said, looking unhappy.

"You've got something better," I said. "*Sense!*"

"Oh, I don't know," said Flax. "After all, if he had any sense, he—"

"Wouldn't have come to Crispin, yeah," I finished for her. "Where does that leave you?"

"Last in line at the waterhole," she said. "I hope."

"Hey, lady!" Fraser said, dodging suddenly away from Lora, who was being helped along by Binky and me, "watch the points on that crutch. You want I should break 'em off shorter for you, maybe?" he said helpfully.

"No, thanks," said Lora, quickly. "This is just fine."

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Fraser shrugged, and joined the trudge waterward.

The "crutch," of course, was the spear-gadget we'd brought with us all the way from that village. Binky and I had thought it best to have some kind of weapon handy, in case any more trouble arose. Max's bunch had naturally left the pistols and canteens safely behind at the shack, away from the pull of Mount X, as I'd come to think of it. I wasn't about to demonstrate the fact that we were armed, not to Max Barton, not yet. But Earth-deserts, barren by day, have an uncomfortable way of coming to life at night. We might meet only the Crispin equivalent of rabbits and prairie dogs. But then again, I didn't relish stumbling over a Crispin rattlesnake, horned viper, gila monster, or tarantula . . .

The pool at the base of the falls was finally reached, and we all paused on the brink, eyeing one another. Who would be the lucky person to get the first swig?

"Why don't we do it by the numbers?" Binky suggested. "You know: We all get on hands and knees by the water, and do a one-for-the-money, two-for-the-show—"

"And everybody chickens out on *Four*," Flax said.

"Whatever may be in it," Lora said, "it can't be as poisonous as all that! I'll just take a sip, and if it's bad-tasting, I'll spit it out."

"And if it's cyanide?" said Flax. "That works awfully fast, you know."

"Cyanide's not a copper compound—" Lora said.

"*Must* the poison be copperish?" Flax asked, calmly.

"She's got a point, there, Lora," I said. "We'd better be careful . . ."

"Damn it to hell!" Flax groused, sitting down on the ground, which was black rock, like the mountain, "I can just see us all found here, years from now: Six mummies frozen in a position of violent discussion!"

"Or six skeletons, in the throes of cupric poisoning," I added.

"Okay," said Flax. "So one of us drinks, and the other five watch him for ill effects . . ."

"And why a '*him*'?" Max inquired politely. "I'd always heard it said: Ladies first."

"To hell with all of you," said Binky, and with that, he dropped down to the brink, plunged his face into the water, and began drinking. I watched the rhythmic movements of his windpipe, as the liquid was swallowed gulp by gulp, and waited to see if he suddenly went prone. Or into convulsions.

Neither happened. After a

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minute's guzzling, Binky lifted his face from the water, dripping wet, and rolled over on the bank with a contented sigh.

"How is it?" I asked.

"It's cold, and it's wet, and if it's poison, I can't taste it," he said.

The next minute or so resembled a Roman Orgy, except that the liquid imbibed was hardly the kind to get even the strictest teetotaler upset. For a long time afterwards, we all just lay on our backs on the bare black rock, and gave satisfied groans as our systems attempted to shuttle the liquid from our alimentary canals to slightly withered cells elsewhere in our bodies.

The desert before us, with its billion facets of pure orange-yellow metal, picked up and amplified the starlight from the black sky, and turned itself into a shimmering sea of pale golden light. It was like watching a marsh mist that had a slight case of jaundice. And then, in the distance, I saw the first moving shape . . .

"Hold it, folks," I whispered, sitting up. "We have company!"

The group bobbed up around me, and looked where I was looking. Great black shapes were gliding smoothly toward us.

"Mr. Blane—" said Binky, his voice low and nervous. "I just thought: This is probably a waterhole for the animals in this desert!"

"Stop reading my mind," I said. "Come on, people, let's get out of here, fast. I don't know what those things are, but the smallest ones are bigger than Fraser, and that's enough for me."

We all scrambled to our feet. I grabbed Lora, and Binky grabbed up the "crutch." I put a hand on his arm.

"Not unless we *have* to!" I cautioned him. "Hey, where's the insulation?"

He mumbled something vaguely vile, and said, "The henna job copped it for a washcloth, to take the travel-stains off her face. I couldn't think of an excuse why not."

"Damn!" I said. Then, "Look, better let *me* take it, then, Bink. I've *already* lost my shirt."

"Morgan," Lora said urgently, "you *can't!* If we're on the desert when you use it, the copper under your feet will act as a conductor, and boost the current!"

"In that case," I said, noting the departing backs of Max's group, "let's just follow their example and run like hell!"

We took off swiftly, trotting at the heels of Max, his pilot, and his redheaded insubordinate, in the direction of the shack. I glanced back and saw that the dark shapes were growing more numerous, lumbering

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silently across the metallic "sand" toward the waterhole.

"Small wonder the shack's way to hell and gone, Lora," I said, keeping a good hold on her arm as we ran. "Your grandfather was averse to getting stepped on in his sleep!"

"But what *are* those things?" Lora asked, frightened.

"Hard to say, in this kind of light," I panted, as we hurried through the darkness, "but whatever they are, they're big, they're fast, and there are hundreds of them. Let's not stand around to check whether or not they're friendly."

"Wait a minute—" Binky gasped, grasping my arm. "The blankets, Mr. Blane! I don't know what I was thinking of, but we can use them!"

"Oh, damn!" I said, stopping and jerking my rolled pack of blanket-and-cord off my shoulders. "Of course! Here, wrap this around the haft of that thing, Bink!"

He took the blanket, still folded, and twisted it about the end of the spear-gadget, holding it tightly with both hands. "Now we should be a match for these things," he said.

Suddenly, up ahead of us in the dark, Flax screamed. Then the other trio came rushing back to us, frantic.

"More of them, coming from in front of us!" Max cried. "We're trapped between two herds . . ."

I looked beyond him. Sure enough, a tide of shuffling black forms was rolling toward us over the starlit desert floor, silent, ponderous and ominous . . .

"Too many, Bink!" I said, as he started to lower the flexible tips of the spear-gadget to the horizontal. "Come on, everybody, straight in toward the mountain wall. We can climb up out of range."

We turned at right angles to our previous path and rushed toward the silent black bulk of the mountain, as the shadow-herd drew nearer and nearer.

"What if they can climb, too?" Max shouted as we ran.

"Then *we* climb *faster!*" I yelled back. "Hurry, damn it!"

We stumbled from the metallic sands onto the sharp-edged surface of the lower mountain slopes, and rushed blindly forward into the shadows. My feet, bereft of even my socks, now, were lanced with shooting stabs of pain as they sprang over that jagged black rocky surface. Binky and I each had one of Lora's arms, half-carrying her so that her feet barely touched the ground at all.

We were downwind of the cataract, now, and some of the cold wet spray was collected into shallow puddles on the stone be-

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neath our hurrying feet, making our haste somewhat treacherous. I was just about to shout a word of caution to the others when my own feet splashed into a collection of these puddles, and I skidded and fell, inadvertently dragging Lora with me. Binky, with Lora torn free of his grasp, stumbled onward a few steps, then went down heavily to the rocks, his hands still clutching the blanket-insulated haft of that spear-gadget, which began to whir at the double-tipped end from the shock of his fall . . .

Then a wiggling, writhing, pencil-thick spark leaped the gap between those vibrating tips, and an eye-searing white thunderbolt zigzagged at a wild angle into the air of the black desert night and blasted a towering shard of Mount X into enormous boulders.

Boulders which instantly were whirled off into the night by their reversed polarity, toward wherever the northeast angle of the range lay.

"What happened? What was that?" Flax cried out from ahead of us. But I was watching the north horizon, waiting for the results of that accidental rushing of the horizontal-avalanche-season . . . Then I saw the white sparks in the distance as those boulders struck home. Would the impact dislodge more rock from over there? . . . An ominous buzzing came through the air, and I had my answer. The return-flight of rocks crashed deafeningly into the mountain wall nearly overhead, and a shower of electrical radiance cascaded down at us as another batch of boulders was knocked loose, re-polarized, and sent flying. It was some holocaust and we were right in the center.

Within minutes, utter electric chaos was broken loose in the hitherto calm desert night. Slower-moving bulks of rock were met by already-returning masses of magnetic stone in mid-air, and shattered into sparkling fragments of death-dealing speed and power. Out on the sands, the black herds were milling about in terror, giving loud roaring cries of confusion, and moving at a fast gallop over the shifting copper sands, striking one another head-on, caroming off broad sides, falling down with hideous squealing noises. And then a bunch of them, falling into a panicky formation, started coming our way, fast, looking, under the intermittent flashes of energy that now lit the sky, like escapees from a madman's nightmare. I caught a glimpse of flat, dull-eyed faces, long limp mouths swaying ponderously from underslung jaws, and high, spiral horns on the broad bony foreheads . . .

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"Binky!" I yelled. "Behind us— The herd!"

He got groggily to his feet, and turned toward the onrushing menace, trying to level the weapon again. Then I saw that he'd let the blanket fall away, and was going to use the thing while standing barefoot in a puddle, yet!

"No!" I yelled, springing to my feet and launching myself at him in an urgent dive that struck the shaft from his hands before I plunged face-first onto the hard black rock.

The next flash I saw was mine alone to view, as my head smacked upon the side of a boulder, and consciousness exploded into silent blackness . . .

CHAPTER 12

FIRST there was warmth, and then the feeling of something soft beneath me, and then my eyes snapped open and I was staring at the interlocked plastic ceiling of the shack. I blinked my eyes, and felt a painful tug somewhere on my right temple. Carefully, I brought my fingers to the spot and touched lightly.

"It's a lump," said a voice. "Egg-shaped, purple and slightly softer than your thick skull."

I raised my head with an effort and saw Flax Dempster sitting on that plastic bench near the foot of the cot where I lay. Hot yellow sunlight was streaming remorselessly in through the faded glassine window and tiny chinks in the walls, where the prefabricated parts had been warped apart. Flax's green eyes were bright, but her face was drawn with tension.

"What happened?" I said, trying to sit up.

Flax came over and sat on the edge of the cot, pushing me back into place, gently. "You brained yourself slightly, that's all. But that lightning-stick thing landed butt-first in a cleft of rock and threw a bolt that turned the whole damned herd around again. Most of them galloped over the horizon and got away."

"Most of them?" I frowned, squinting in the brightness.

"Light bother you? Here—" Flax tugged a loose piece of canvas that served as a curtain over the glassine, and the room's golden glow abated somewhat. "Some of them had fractured their skulls from running into one another. They were still there this morning, so Fraser and Binky rigged up a spit and roasted some of the meat. Then Madame Curie suggested making waterbags out of the skins, or something, and lugging fresh drink back here to us. Want some?"

She lifted the metal canteen with an effort, and I heard a wonderful sloshing inside it. She

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didn't wait for my answer, just twisted off the cap and held it to my lips with one hand, the other supporting my head. I swallowed the cold liquid gladly, then wiped my lips with the back of my wrist as she replaced the cap.

"Isn't that hard to handle, in the magnetic field?" I asked, as she set the canteen back into a small pocket of wall, where it couldn't be dragged across the floor as the gun had been the evening before.

"I do you a favor, maybe you'll do me one," she said, with a brief wink of one eye.

"I don't have my checkbook with me—" I started, then bit the words off before finishing, as a sudden taut whiteness appeared beneath her eyes. "Sorry," I said contritely, "that was uncalled for."

"Yes, it was," she said, and turned away her face, though she remained seated on my bedside.

"Say," I went on, hoping a subject-change might relieve the bad feeling that had sprung up between us, "where are the others?"

"Listen," said Flax, grinning wryly, and tilting her head toward the Mount X side of the shack. I attuned my ears in that direction and did as bidden.

Faintly, I caught a sound of heavy thuds, and shouts, some of them shouts of laughter. "What gives?" I said, "It sounds like Jones Beach in July."

"They're playing Blast-the-Flicker, with that lightning-stick," Flax drawled, with a weary headshake.

"What! But why?" I demanded. "This is no time for childish games—"

"Oh, it's not a game," Flax said, anticipating my statement. "Fraser, with his high mechanical 'appetite', thinks he might be able to fix it to fly solo, by itself, to Radnor, with a Send Help message scratched on the chassis, or whatever. So then Lora Merrick said—" Flax widened her eyes in a devastatingly accurate mimicry of Lora's usual I've-*got*-it! expression, clapped her hands together, and went on, " '*Say*, folks! If *we* can *blast* the *Flicker*-parts, then *they'll* reverse po-*lar*-ity and fly *loose*, and *then*—' "

"Hold it," I said, chuckling despite myself. "She doesn't really singsong like that, Flax!"

"Well, she comes close enough to it to turn my tummy, slightly," Flax said, shaking her head. "Anyhow, they're out there, now, indulging in an electronic skeet-shoot. They electrify a Flicker-chunk, then when it flies off the wall toward the other range, they blast it down in mid-air, and all dive on it before it can skid along the ground back to the

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wall it just left. More fun than ducking for apples!"

Outside, I heard a crackling boom, then a shrill squeal of male and female laughter, another boom, then the sounds of frantic running about and general horseplay.

"Sounds jolly," I admitted. "But you shouldn't pick on Lora, Flax. Didn't she tell you we were engaged?"

"No, but I suspected something of the sort," Flax said, moodily. "Chalk up another conquest for cowlike eyes!"

"Aw, come on, don't be like that," I said.

"Why not?" Flax spun to face me. "Honestly, Morgan, I don't know what you see in her. All she knows is electronics, and all you know is the New York theater. I can just see you two on an opening night. You'll be trying to watch the performance, and she'll be putting a bee in your ear about the ingenuity of the inventor of the revolving stage . . ."

"Aw, lay off, will you," I said softly. "Why, I've never felt this way about anyone before. This is the real thing, Flax."

"How do you know?" she said, staring into my eyes in a very disconcerting manner. "That session we had in the treetops wasn't exactly a dud."

"Listen, then—" I said, and started telling her about Lora. How anxious I'd been when we'd been originally separated, how I'd risked my life investigating that fangface prison to find her, how worried I'd felt when she was so weak on the down-journey toward the shack— "Didn't you ever feel like that, Flax?" I said, finishing. "What else is it but love?"

"It's manhood, stupid," said Flax, bitterly, folding her arms. "The urge to protect the helpless. Yes, I've felt it, too, that feeling, Morgan. I used to have a kitten. It was constantly falling down behind the stove, tripping over its own whiskers, and lolloing around with sick eyes when it had a bad piece of salmon for dinner— And I went out of my way to take care of it, but I hardly felt obliged to *propose!*"

"You're jealous, aren't you!" I remarked.

"Why shouldn't I be?" she said angrily. "Damn it, Morgan, *I* like you, too. And here you are, going head-over-heels about a little ball of fluff with a transistor for a heart!"

"Now, now," I said, soothingly. "You feel this way at the moment, because I'm young, and available, and—"

"Don't flatter yourself, Morgan Blane," said Flax. "At the *moment*, you have a three-day scraggly growth of black prickles on your face, a sunburnt nose,

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and you smell like you've been wallowing in sheepdip!"

I remembered my goatskin jacket with chagrin. "I meant to take a shower," I said. Then, "Well, if it's not my looks, it must be my money."

"What money?" Flax snapped. "What good is your damned checkbook in this desert?"

"We might get back . . ." I said slowly.

"Okay!" she raged, standing up and glaring at me, her hands balled into fists, and arms ramrods at her sides. "So when we get back, *then* you accuse me of mercenary motives, not before!" Crystal tears suddenly sparkled in those bright green eyes. "In the meantime, shut up, you louse!"

"Hey, Flax . . ." I said, concerned. "I didn't mean to—" My hand reached out and took hold of hers. She was trembling, violently, and breathing fast, through flaring nostrils . . .

Then she dropped down again upon the bed, sitting and looking into my eyes. A queer tingling sensation began at the back of my neck as I looked into those eyes—

"Flax . . ." I said hoarsely. "What—?"

Her hands, cool and firm, slipped down at either side of my throat, as if she would strangle me. Then they slid back of my neck, and her lips were suddenly pressing on mine, with a fierce warmth that startled me. My arms, of their own volition, came up around her and pulled her tightly to me.

That kiss scared me. I was shaking when she pulled her lips away from mine and buried her face against the pillow behind my head, her cheek hot against my own, and her flaming hair like golden silk across my face. I held onto her, not knowing quite what to do. It had been such a *hungry* kiss, with such inexpressible yearning in it.

Like an idiot, I kept stroking her back with one hand, and murmuring, "Easy, easy," over and over into her ear.

"Hold me, Morgan," she sobbed, "hold me."

What the hell. I held her. After a moment, I couldn't bear much more propinquity. I was hotter than the desert climate could account for.

"Is— Is this just a way of ensuring leniency, or something, when we get back?" I said. I couldn't think straight.

Flax lifted her head and stared into my eyes. "Is that what you really think, Morgan?" Her voice was suddenly very tired. I couldn't meet her gaze.

"I don't know what to think anymore," I grunted, uneasily.

"Well," she said, sitting up and pushing back her hair,

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"that's progress of sorts, anyhow."

I took hold of her hand, and kept hold of it, not saying anything. She watched me, curiously, then said, "You have the oddest expression. What are you thinking?"

I grinned. "I was just realizing what I like about you, Flax . . . You're— You're *resilient*."

"Why, Mis-ter Blane!" she said, with feigned shock, and a very prudent straightening of the front of her blouse collar.

"Not *that way!*" I laughed. "I mean your personality. Do you know I've never seen anyone bounce back as nicely as you do. I've done nothing but be nasty to you—"

"Agreed," said Flax without hesitation.

"Even at our first meeting, I implied something or other about you . . ."

"You implied that I was no stranger to harsh expletive. Well, it's true. I don't *use* such bad language, but I doubt if there's any word you could employ that I wouldn't be able to recognize. No harm in that, is there?"

"No, none," I admitted. "But you're kind of courageous, too. It took nerve to run off into the jungle like you did, when you left me that time. Even with those guns."

"Want to know a secret?" she said, abruptly.

I nodded, interested.

"I wasn't running off because of what you'd said about having me arrested. I took off because I didn't trust myself alone with you any longer. You bring out the beast in me."

I laughed. "You don't exactly blunt my fangs, either."

"Too bad," said Flax, staring with a secret smile at the ceiling, "that you're so mad about Lora Merrick . . ."

I realized with a start that I'd quite forgotten Lora for the moment. ". . . Oh, yeah," I whispered. "Lora."

"Your fiancee, remember?" Flax goaded me.

I lay back and looked at her, quite beautiful in the just-bright-enough diffused sunlight of that single room. "You're a very intriguing person, Flax," I said. "Tell me, how did you get into this setup, anyhow?"

"The way I told you. Or, rather, the way you guessed. Max Barton offered me a billion dollars. I didn't say no. Would *you* have?"

"It wasn't honest," I evaded.

"Answer the question," Flax prodded.

"Well—" I said. "I can't say. After all, I'm rich enough already . . ."

"Nice, the way you skirt the

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issue," said Flax. "What if you were me, Morgan, and you got a chance like Barton offered. Could you simply say you wouldn't?"

"Maybe not," I admitted. "How about your real grandfather? Still alive?"

She shook her head. "Died in the Second World War."

"So there's no chance that Max had you fooled about this so-called inheritance?" I said.

"What are you doing," she said suddenly, "trying to find excuses for me? Can't you like me unless I'm perfect, Morgan?"

"What are you talking about?" I said guiltily, quite aware what she meant.

"That you, in your holier-than-thou way, are on the brink of taking a shine to me," she said wearily. "Only I have to meet the Blane Standard, don't I? If you can convince yourself that I was Max's dupe, fine. You are just dying for me to lie and say I've been the innocent victim of this shyster lawyer. And the part that kills me is that you'll *know* it's not *true!* But some fussy little part of your ego wants to hear me *say* it, anyway."

I sat up on the cot. "Now, Flax, I didn't—"

"Lie down!" she said. I did. "Well, Morgan, I'm *not* going to lie just to make things easy on your stilted conscience! The truth is that Max asked me to do something crooked, I knew it was crooked, and I said, *'Swell! When do we start?'!"*

I said, "Oh," very softly, then lay there, silent.

"So if you ever get over this infantile crush you have for that fluffy feline physicist and want me instead, you take me as I am, or not at all. I'm a *crook,* Morgan . . . Morgan, did you hear me? I'm involved in attempted larceny, of my own free will."

"Are— Are you sorry?" I said, hopefully.

"Not in the least," said Flax. "I won't even give you *that* satisfaction."

"What satisfaction?" I demanded.

"Charity. Reclaiming the poor misguided girl. Taking her from her evil path toward crime and— Nope, you take me, crookedness and all, and maybe I'll repent later. But I won't even guarantee it."

"You stinker," I said, softly.

"Look who's talking," she laughed. "B.O. Blane!"

"Come here," I said, and grabbed her, pulling her down to me again. Her lips were still hungry against mine, but a lot of the desperation was gone from her attitude. She laid her cheek against mine once more, and whispered gently, "I hope that damned Flicker's in at least a million pieces . . ."

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Then I realized that I hadn't been hearing that blasting noise for some time. I looked toward the door, which was part-way open, and saw shadows approaching over the copper-sand surface.

"Whoops!" I said, sitting up. "Take ten, Flax."

She broke away and stared at me, oddly. "Why the long guilty face, Morgan? Aren't you a free agent?"

"I don't want to startle her, is all," I said. "I'd rather explain it to her than have her just bust in and get the wrong impression—"

"The wrong impression?" said Flax, with an arch of one trim eyebrow.

"All right, all right," I muttered. "The *right* impression, then. Better?"

"Much."

The foursome came in the door, all of them carrying bits and pieces of electronic parts, fighting the tug of the mountain. They looked over at us, then stacked the junk against the wall, where it stacked easily enough, due to the pull from the mountain out beyond it.

Lora, even more sunburnt, but nowhere near as weak-looking as the night before, stared at me, a funny look on her face.

I wondered for a frantic instant if it were lipstick-smears again, then remembered that Flax hadn't been wearing any, and relaxed a bit.

"How— How's your head, Morgan?" Lora asked.

"Purple," I said, "but relatively painless."

"That's good," she said. "Do you want some meat? We cooked up some of the flesh of those buffalo, or whatever they were. It's not bad . . ."

"It tastes like an old innersole boiled in butter," said Binky. "But it hasn't poisoned any of us."

The conversation seemed normal enough, but there was a tremor of high tension in that room. I looked at the group, closely. Max seemed as usual, a little nettled and nervous, but Binky, Fraser and Lora seemed uncomfortable.

"Lora . . ." I said. "What's the matter?"

She faltered a smile, which faded instantly, then took a hesitant step toward me, and said, "Morgan, I—"

The air outside was suddenly split by a piercing roar of sound, a roar that grew louder and louder, from a high-pitched screech to a thunderous boom. I vaulted out of the cot and stumbled to the doorway beside Flax, the others already having dashed outside to see the cause of the disturbance. My mind was alive with unnerving images of mag-

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netic avalanches, stampeding herds, flying thunderbolts, or even charging fangfaces. But it was none of these.

Settling with ponderous grace down into a whirling cloud of blast-disturbed copper sand, I beheld the stately gray needle of a Space Force Battleship, its wide tail vanes extending flat-bottomed hydraulic rods to cushion the shock of landing. As it came to rest, and the dazzling copper cloud began to settle back to the desert floor, from the side opposite Mount X long metal darts sprang out, diving into the shifting sands and pulling a network of long cables taut against the tug of the magnetic mountainside.

"I'll be damned," I said to Flax. "They must have been here before!"

We raced out to the ship, and stood waiting with the others as the circular airlock swung open, and a pair of uniformed men descended to the ground in a most efficient manner.

As the men, officers, reached us, Fraser came smartly to attention and saluted. They returned the salute, then the older one, a captain, said, "At ease," and looked over the rest of us. "Which of you," he said, "is "Maximilian Barton?"

Max, his eyes bugging with surprise, said, "*I* am, Captain . . ."

The officer nodded, bleakly. "I have a warrant for your arrest."

"*What?!*" Max bleated. "What for?"

"It says for fraud," the captain explained. "The authorities back on Earth thought we'd find you here. Seems you registered a claim on a copper mine belonging to someone else, Mr. Barton."

"But they— How could they— It's not true!" he said.

"The Government Assayer's office says different," said the captain, unsmilingly. "Just after your claim came in and was registered, they got a pre-dated claim to the identical spot, made out by one Ira Merrick."

"Grandfather!" Lora exclaimed. "He sent a duplicate copy to the claims office!"

"Well—it's—it's a coincidence, that's all!" Max blustered. "Apparently, two people discovered the same strike of copper, and—"

"And drew up exactly the same map?" said the captain. "Your map is a duplicate of his, drawn on the same type of paper, penned by the same hand. *His.*"

"Then she *lied!*" Max said, desperately, spinning and pointing a finger at Flax. "She came to me with that map, and said that it was *her* grandfather who had discovered it—"

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The captain turned to Flax, his eyes narrowed with suspicion. "Is that true, Miss?" he said.

Flax's eyes locked on mine, helplessly.

"Of course not!" I blurted.

"Who the hell are you?" the captain said to me, in a curt voice.

"Tell him, Lora!" I said, passing the buck.

"He's the man who brought me up here to save the mine, that's all!" she said, with a stubborn jut of her jaw at the captain. "His name is Morgan Blane, and he's got millions of dollars!"

"Well, la-de-da!" said the captain, unimpressed. "But— Are you vouching for this woman, Mr. Blane?"

I looked at Flax, then at Lora, then back at the captain. "S-Sure!" I said. "She— She was working for *me*, all along!"

"He's crazy!" Max shouted. "She was not!"

"How do you know?" said the captain.

"Because she was working for *me*—" Max blurted, then stopped, aghast.

"I think you'd better come along, Mr. Barton," said the captain. He turned to Flax. "And you, too, Miss."

"Why?" I said. "You haven't got a warrant for her, have you?"

"Well, no," said the captain, "but I thought—"

"You're just the arresting officer, remember," I cautioned him. "It's not your place to pass judgment. If the courts want her, they'll have to send her a subpoena."

"He's lying!" Max shouted. "He's in love with her!"

"Is that true?" said the officer.

"*Yes!*" I snapped, avoiding Lora's eyes. "And that *proves* she's innocent! Would a guy with a few million bucks go around falling in love with *crooks?*"

"Morgan!" came a cry from Lora. I looked over at her, bracing myself for the pain, the shock on her face. When my gaze reached her face, I had to blink and look twice. I could see nothing but relief and elation.

"You're not mad?" I said.

"No!" she cried, happily. "That's what I was going to tell you, back in the shack, Morgan. I— I'm in love with someone else!"

"*Who*, for Pete's sake?" I exclaimed.

"With the most beautiful electronic mind I've met in the entire universe!" she sighed, turning and taking her newfound love by the hand.

"*Fraser?!*" I gasped.

"Yes," she said, "isn't it wonderful?"

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"It's— It's *perfect!*" I laughed, staring stupidly from her to Flax, who seemed as happily stupefied as I was.

"Okay, okay," said the captain. "Break it up. What I want to know is: Who's coming with me?"

"All of us!" I said. "And the sooner, the better."

The captain just stared.

"It was nice of Lora to drop the charges against me," Flax murmured, snuggling close to me. We were in subspace, riding Earthward in a military vessel that had been taking some rotating troops home from duty.

"I had to twist her arm, slightly," I grinned. "Not in the physical sense, of course. I wouldn't dare, not with that behemoth she's affianced to standing by. I just told her I'd sue her for the price of the Brunhilde if she didn't lay off."

"She has a fortune," Flax said, with a frown. "Why should that stop her?"

"She intends to save every penny of it," I said. "That's why she stopped."

"Would you tell me something, Morgan?" said Flax, nestling her face behind mine.

"Sure. What?"

"Well, if those military men had been on Crispin before, how come *they* didn't spot that desert of copper?"

"Oh, that," I chuckled. "Seems we were wrong about the stuff. It's copper, all right, but a Crispin variation, an isotope, stable —as Lora explained it—that won't carry a current of electricity to save its life. I should have figured there was something funny about it when it never once reacted to the magnetic field of that mountain range."

Flax goggled at me. "Then where's her fortune coming from?"

"Fraser," I said. "It seems that *he's* the guy who went and *invented* the Lectralift drive! He gets half a million bucks for each one they build."

"Why the little gold-digger!" Flax exclaimed.

"Look who's talking," I said, and kissed her. "Can the captain of a spaceship perform a wedding ceremony?" I muttered.

"That's what he told me when I asked him," she grinned.

Once again I was treed by a redhead. Of course, there's a lot to be said for outdoor living. . . .

THE END

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IMPRESSIONIST

Radigan looked at the painting with a collector's naked avidity and a man's naked fear. Would he ever know the meaning behind its horror?

By ROBERT F. YOUNG

RADIGAN paused at the base of the steep slope and glanced back up at the palatial chalet pre-empting the hilltop. Usually the sight of it reassured him. This morning it did not.

He brought his eyes back to his immediate surroundings. Before him the canal flowed cold and clear, and across the canal, beyond the perimeter of his domed demesne, ochre plains rolled lazily away to the soft shapes of distant mountains. Around him on the canal bank scintillating crystal trees awaited the first breath from the automatic breeze-machine, and above him, beyond the transparent roof of the dome, the mauve Martian sky prepared for the pale footsteps of the ascending sun.

Not a discordant note in the whole scene, Radigan thought—as long as you excluded the bright cube hovering just above the bank, some several hundred yards away.

He lit a cigarette—a standard operating procedure when he was confronted by the not-quite-comprehensible — and briefly tinged the artificial air with a lungful of bluish smoke. He knew he should return to the chalet and turn over the investigation of the cube to his private police force, or, better yet, forget about it altogether. He had long since learned the futility of interfering with Martian phenomena.

But the cube intrigued him . . .

He had noticed it first from the veranda-room of the chalet. Harrow, the art dealer, had been breakfasting with him, having coptered in the preceding evening with the Psomanka origi-

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nal Radigan had commissioned him to buy, and the two men were discussing the painting over their coffee, Harrow with enthusiasm, Radigan with a sort of fascinated horror.

Radigan had ordered the painting sight-unseen. He was a collector, but he was not a connoisseur. He conducted his art ventures in the same way he conducted his business ventures—on a grand and indiscriminate scale. His business enterprises stretched all the way from Venus to Neptune; his collection of paintings extended all the way from Hogarth's "The Rake's Progress" to Neliedlieden's "A Venerian Afternoon." Now it included the most coveted collector's item of all—Psomanka's "Portrait of a Man Gnawing a Bone."

"It is possible to understand Psomanka," Harrow was saying, "but first you must level all the barriers of orthodox thinking. You have to free your mind. Let yourself go."

"I'm not sure I want to understand him," Radigan said.

He was thinking of the previous evening when, with trembling fingers, he had undone the oiled wrappings and unrolled the ancient canvas. The thousand-credit chandelier, suspended like a minature galaxy from the ceiling of the game room, elicited each ghastly detail with such shocking vividness that for a moment he stood there mesmerized, incapable of removing his eyes from the obscene creature he had innocently brought to life.

There was an indeterminable hazy-blue background—the edge, perhaps, of a primeval forest, and then again, perhaps not. When dealing with a Psomanka painting, you could never be entirely sure of anything. In the foreground there was a terrace of some kind, consisting of greenish flagstones. And on the terrace stood—or, more aptly, crouched—Psomanka's version of a man.

He was naked and obese. His pallid flesh hung in ropy folds around his bloated waist. He was frozen in an attitude of horrified surprise, as though something, or someone, had just frightened him completely out of his senses. His eyes were livid receptacles filled with stark hopeless terror. His wide loose-lipped mouth was slavering. Most loathsome of all was the white partly-gnawed bone which he clutched avidly to his breast.

Radigan was hardened to Martian art at its most grotesque, but that night his sleep had been a horrid succession of nightmares. Worst of all was the recurrent feeling of familiarity—the deep-rooted conviction that

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in that hideous face in the painting there was a resemblance to someone he knew very well, someone he had known for a long time. But try as he would, he could not remember whom.

Harrow was talking again: "You have to keep in mind that the Martian expressionist of that era had a wide perspective. He had an inkling of what infinity is all about, and that inkling flavored everything he painted. That's why when we, from our cramped viewpoint, examine a Psomanka, we have to let ourselves go in order even to begin to comprehehnd its symbolism. We have to consider every possibility."

"And every impossibility," Radigan said. "Including the impossibility of his having been able to find such a gruesome subject to pose for him in the first place."

"You miss the point utterly." Harrow was annoyed. He was careful, however, to keep his annoyance in check. Radigan knew why: it was not prudent to antagonize a man who could buy and sell nations, who could, with a flick of his fingers, instigate an interplanetary war. "Literally, there never was such a creature as the painting depicts," Harrow went on. "Psomanka depicted a physically normal individual from an indefinite age, but he depicted him as he, from his macrocosmic perspective, saw him. It was sort of like God painting a mortal."

"That's absurd!"

Harrow shook his head. "I'm afraid it's nothing of the sort. It is, as a matter of fact, the one and only resolution that holds water. By portraying his subject in the nude and by stressing his obesity, Psomanka suggested depravity of character. By accenting his subject's bestiality, he implied that ethically his subject was but little above the level of beasthood."

It was at this point that Radigan had noticed the cube. Harrow was sitting with his back to the wide observatory window, and Radigan, opposite him, commanded an excellent view of the canal. At first he thought that the sun was reflecting in some unique fashion from its surface. Then, when the phenomenon persisted, he realized that a box-shaped concentration of bright light had winked into being just above the bank and was gradually intensifying into a rather terrifying tangibility.

Harrow's voice droned on. "When you're up against a race that was innately telepathic and that possessed time travel before its extinction, you're up against the ultimate enigma. You've got one paradox on top of another. Martian history is fantastic. It

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encompasses events that happened millennia after it was recorded —events that in many instances have yet to occur. It records the progress of a people that lived a million years ahead of themselves and a million years behind themselves. A race of immortal mortals that will keep cropping up forever.

"How then can transient creatures like ourselves even begin to understand their art unless we completely unleash our imaginations? Consider the partly-gnawed bone in the Psomanka. Obviously it is symbolic—but what does it symbolize?"

With an effort Radigan transferred his gaze from the cube to his guest. "To me it suggests the uncouth femur of some prehistoric Martian mammal," he said.

"That is merely what it appears to be. Actually it might be anything. It might be a planet. Remember, we are unleashing our imaginations. It might even be a solar system . . ."

Radigan was too preoccupied to comment. He was impatient for Harrow to leave so that he could go down the hillside and investigate the cube. It had seemed, at first, to be an ideal way to kill an otherwise dull morning, and consequently he had kept the discovery to himself. He had hardly been able to conceal his eagerness when Harrow, at last perceiving that his analysis of the Psomanka was being ignored, got up, made his farewells, and departed.

Now, standing on the canal bank, Radigan wished that he had not come. He wished that he were back in the chalet, watching comfortably and safely from the veranda room while his private police did the investigating. It occurred to him that his boredom must be unhealthily acute for it to have driven him upon such a potentially dangerous mission. It did not occur to him that he had so desperately wanted to take his mind off the horror he had just added to his collection that he had instinctively pounced upon the first distraction to come along.

But there was no turning back. He had his self-respect to contend with and he knew that if he were to retain what little of it he still had left, he had to go on. He resumed walking reluctantly. The brightness of the cube hurt his eyes, and he lowered them to the mossy flagstones inlaid upon the canal bank. He did not raise them again till he was quite close to his objective. When he did so he saw that the cube was not nearly as bright now; that it had acquired a stability that had been lacking before. It was as though it were resolving itself—regaining a reality it had temporarily

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lost. It was not nearly as large as he had expected it would be either.

As a matter of fact, it was just about the right size for a man to sit in it comfortably. A man—or a Martian . . .

Now a shadow was beginning to show faintly beyond the translucent walls. A shadow . . . and then a shape. A shape substanceless at first, then gradually, implacably, solidifying—

The breeze-machine went on, and the crystal trees rattled in its sudden breath. Ripples like blue gooseflesh sprang out on the surface of the canal. Abruptly Radigan wanted to turn and run —to flee back up the blue-green hillside to the security of his chalet. To shut out forever the hideous realization that was crawling into his mind. But he could not move. He could only stand there helplessly while the last of his sanity drained away.

He was still standing there when Psomanka, carrying his collapsible easel, his palette and brushes, stepped out of the time-chamber into the moment.

THE END

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According to you...

Dear Editor:

I was overjoyed to see the article about, and the story by Howard Phillips Lovecraft in the May issue, and indeed, his name on the cover insured my immediate purchase. It seems that, considering the fine quality of his writing and the great acclaim he has received (especially from August Derleth) Lovecraft's works are exceedingly difficult to obtain. The thick catalog in the largest bookstore here lists only five books of his stories as being in print, and according to a short sketch about Lovecraft printed in 1953, the out-of-print collections were bringing "from $60 to $100 a copy."

August Derleth's anthologies seemed to have fared pretty well in respect to circulation, and as many of these contain one of Lovecraft's stories, they proved a trickling source for the Lovecraft follower. Seemingly the best and most widely spread collection is a paperback, "Cry Horror" a reprint of "The Lurking Fear," and this is a tremendous help.

Despite these, however, there are many of Lovecraft's stories still for all practical purposes unobtainable. Possibly it would be a worthwhile project for *Fantastic* to collect and print these stories, if conditions of copyrights, etc. permit. Of course, there is the possibility that little public demand for H. P. L. exists, and other letters, or the lack of them, may tell. If, however, readers do like Lovecraft, *Fantastic* might find a greatly appreciated feature in the reprinting of his stories.

Thomas Dilley
1590 Robinson Dr. N.
St. Petersburg 10, Fla.

Dear Editor:

Thank you so much for the May 1960 issue of *Fantastic*. I first read the article on H. P. Lovecraft by Sam Moskowitz. I was very

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proud to have read it. Then I moved to Lovecraft's story, "The Challenge From Beyond." I found it to be one of the most thrilling, stimulating, and productive works in the literature known as science fiction. I can hardly wait until another issue of this magazine reaches my hands.

J. F. Bone is getting better all the time. "When the Sea-King's Away" by Fritz Leiber was very, very good. J. T. McIntosh's "World Without Annette" was also good.

I hope the readers of *Fantastic* will see stories by Henry Slesar, Jack Sharkey, Raymond F. Jones, Murray Leinster, Christopher Anvil, Alfred Bester and Richard Matheson.

I like the style of John Duillo, the new artist.

Bill Wolfenbarger

Dear Editor:

I don't think there is any doubt that I have been a faithful reader of *Fantastic* and *Amazing* for the past two years and although I have been disappointed at times, I have held on. My faith in you has been gigantically affirmed by the contents of the May issue of *Fantastic*.

The greatest line-up you have had in *many* months. The beginning of Sam Moskowitz's series of informative articles should increase circulation among many of the fans who have sidled away and if you can come through with some more undiscovered yarns, or for that matter occasional reprints such as "The Four Sided Triangle" several months ago, you will have the best magazines on the stands.

You nearly always manage to come through with the best fiction available by the top authors, with the exception of an occasional "sexy space" story in poor taste, or perhaps it should be worded "spacy sex" story. The artwork is good on the exterior, but only the bubbles man, Virgil Finlay, comes through on the interior. I suggest some better inside illos. I like your covers, and don't feel that you should go chasing down Emshwiller and Freas just for conformity's sake. As a bit of apparently useless repetition, I, too, suggest the reintroduction of the fan column. The fans make the zines and although you haven't adopted Lowndes' policy of, as some of the fans put it, "to hell with the fan," you still don't recognize the fans to any great degree.

You have begun to extend the letter column a little, and I guess that is certainly a welcome change; I just hope it is not a tentative

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extension, but rather is the beginning of your rise to the top spot in the science fiction magazine field.

Bill Plott
P.O. Box 654
Opelika, Ala.

Dear Editor:

This is the first letter I have written to a professional magazine for a very long time. The occasion, but not the reason, is the May *Fantastic*. I used to read the Palmer mags back in my early adolescence with a good deal of enjoyment. Then something happened; there was a change in editors; the stories began to get first dull and then downright bad. Even though I am a collector I quit buying; *Amazing* and *Fantastic* were the worst publications in a field of thirty-three. About a year and a half ago I noticed an issue of one or the other that looked interesting and I bought it. I enjoyed it. A couple of months later I bought another issue. I find that I have bought every issue for a solid year now. I like the magazine again. I find that it is fun to read; it is edited with taste and perception. It is meeting an old friend grown up *and still growing*. The magazines are better than they were a year ago, and I have no doubt that a year from now they will be better still. For all this I thank you.

The May *Fantastic* is typical. There is nothing exceptional in it, but everything is enjoyable, and if nothing is very far from average *Fantastic* fare, that average is stunningly higher than it was just a couple of years ago.

The Moskowitz article is interesting, and I guess that it and the Leiber story were really what prompted me to stop admiring in silence and compliment you to your face. Moskowitz is not a terribly good writer, but his subject matter is intensely interesting, and it is handled well enough to make this series some of the best criticism of the field being done today. Keep this series; it leaves *Fantastic* a very well-balanced and pleasing magazine. Light fantasy, weird fantasy, adventure science fiction, problem science fiction, and an article. Something to every taste and everything to my taste.

Even the Lovecraft, which probably pleased me less than anything else. Had I not read the "Shadow Out of Time," I probably would have rated it the best item in the issue; it is definitely the most literate. The horror, though, that of the man finding himself in the body of the creature, was used as one of the minor horrors in the

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novel, and if it is through space instead of time, and into the body of a worm instead of a pyramid, it is still the same gimmick. Newcomers to Lovecraft, though, I expect will enjoy it. I found it too familiar to pack real punch.

The cover is neither your best nor your worst for the year; the color and composition are pleasing. I would tend to rate it among the better ones.

So all in all, it is a good magazine, every story was enjoyable, even if none were outstanding, I was satisfied on reading it. And what more could one ask?

Al Lewis
706 San Lorenzo St.
Santa Monica, Calif.

● *We are very pleased with the enthusiastic and positive response to the May issue of* Fantastic. *Because the preceding letters express similar sentiments, we are taking the opportunity to comment on them as a group. Be assured that we are not going to sit back and reap our laurels. Far from it . . . this is just the beginning and we hope that every future issue of* Fantastic *will carry even more letters, for and against (no need saying what our preference is) the stories and special features which we are selecting as carefully as you would wish.*

Dear Editor:

I just read the May *Fantastic*, and you seem to be answering your readers' call for fantasy. A very good issue, the high point of which was Sam Moskowitz's "Study in Horror." I've been reading *Amazing* regularly for a year now but picking up *Fantastic* only occasionally. However, I will make a point of getting every issue which has one of Sam's superb articles!

As for the rest of the issue, "Fireman" was an above average sf yarn, but "The Challenge From Beyond" suffered from the same defect much of Lovecraft's fiction does. Any reader who was surprised at the ending—and from the style he was obviously supposed to be—belongs in an institute for the feeble-minded!

And I notice that Mr. Bone has, at least in name, been using the background of Mr. De Camp's excellent *Viagens Interplanetaries* stories with Mr. De Camp's blessings, I presume.

Ahhh! Another of Fritz Leiber's Fafhrd and Grey Mouser Stories! Keep 'em comin'.

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"World Without Annette" was very good, but "Devil's Due" was only so-so.

Make the letter-column and editorial longer! Speaking of the lettercol, I am glad to see that you are starting to print longer letters, like that of Jeff Newman. And readers like Hector Pessina might be interested in America's largest Science Fiction correspondence club, the National Fantasy Fan Federation. Either I, or the secretary, Janie Lamb, Rout 1, Heiskell, Tennessee, will gladly supply information.

Edmund R. Meskys
723A, 45th St.
Brooklyn 20, N. Y.

● *The Lovecraft story was published more as a memento than as an example of current standards in fantasy writing. I grant all that you and others may say about HPL's style, and I agree. But still virtually no other horror-fantasy writer can give me the same chill, the same unreasoning hackle-raising! Have you re-read "Beyond the Wall of Night" recently?*

Dear Editor:

I'd like to register a few complaints about *Fantastic*. First, it is too short. Why don't you make it as long as *Amazing?* Second, you need to have book reviews. I don't think it would hurt S. E. Cotts to read two or three more books each month and review them in *Fantastic*. His reviews in *Amazing* are good. Third, you should publish occasional novels and serials. I'm looking forward to Jack Sharkey's serial in the July and August issues. Sharkey is your best steady writer.

I have only been reading *Fantastic* for three months and it is quite good. With a little correction here and there, it could be as good as *Amazing*, which is my favorite magazine.

There is only one more thing to complain about: why don't you enlarge the letter section? No more complaints. They probably won't do any good anyway.

Michael Padgett
3230 Washington Rd.
Augusta, Georgia

● *On the contrary, complaints are always taken to heart and look what can result: the July issue* was *the same size as* Amazing. *You*

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had a serial and undoubtedly will have more as time goes on. The letter section is getting longer. You may have to start inventing things to complain about, just to keep in touch with us.

Dear Editor:

A few comments about *Fantastic:* Glad to see Sharkey doing longer bits, and without losing anything in the transitions as do some authors. His "Doomsday Army" in the April *Fantastic* was just about his best so far. Next, I suppose we'll be seeing a full length novel.-Also glad to see that someone has latched on to Sam Moskowitz and got him back writing again. I liked his articles when he worked for *Satellite,* and I like them even more now that you have him.

Re: fantasy in general . . . I'm not trying to be a bore or anything, but in agreeing with a few others who have written letters to you . . . What do you mean that fantasy is so hard to get? Two new mags, *Fear* and *Shock* seem to be doing just fine. Not to mention such things as "Zacherleys Midnight Snacks" and "Tales to be Told in the Dark" published by Ballantine; also Bantam's "Night Ride and Other Journeys" by Beaumont. The authors are there, all you have to do is hook them.

B. Joseph Fekete, Jr.
212 Cooley Road
RFD #2
Grafton, Ohio

☺ *Hooks bring to mind fishing; fishing takes patience; in time, who knows, you may find all the fantasy you yearn for right on these pages.*

Dear Editor:

You have complained that you can't get enough good fantasy stories. Now, I correspond with a large number of pro and semi-pro writers and fans who all are capable of making Sharkey look like an even bigger fool than he does himself. (It's hard to believe you'd publish him if you'd read him.)

Now, I hate seeing a good magazine like *Fantastic* (I've told you what I think of the improvements you've made), being inundated by those refugees from *F&SF* and their stories (all duly rejected by Mills.) But you do have Leiber and Bloch, and as you say, good fantasy is hard to find, so you *have* to take bad fantasy. The good

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fantasy does more than make up for it. It almost makes up for Summers drawing.

But these writers I mentioned have been crying for a fantasy market. They seem to labor under the belief that there is none. Is that right? Palmer said that you have to go out and get good stories; they don't just come onto your desk without effort.

So, why not go out and get some good stories by some good, living writers of fantasy such as Derleth, Donald Wandrai, Clark Ashton Smith, Seabury Quinn, Theodore Sturgeon. . . .

After these suggestions, I'm beginning to like you even more just for reading this far. I'm serious about these writers. I've culled my preference list and mention only the ones I think you can get to write for you.

See, I've done the work. All you have to do is look around and ask politely, and if you don't get any answers, I won't be mad, I won't even stop buying your magazines. Just, please ask. Just this once. You've rejected so many pleas to get good, established writers that it's discouraging to even see you on the newsstand.

You publish Leiber, Bloch and Moskowitz on a regular basis and balance them with trash, and an occasional good story from a big name. Whatever happened to editors who discovered genuine talent? I hope you can find someone, though, and mold him into a great writer. You deserve all the praise the world can muster for snatching the Moskowitz series. If you can avoid fuggheaded articles like some you've picked in the past, you'll have a great balance.

Jerry Page
193 Battery Pl., NE,
Atlanta 7, Ga.

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Dear Editor:

The May cover of *Fantastic* was up to your usual low standard. I don't know why but *Fantastic* never seems as good as *Amazing*. Is there an editorial policy that might account? For that matter is there supposed to be any difference between the two? If so what is it?

Another science-short editorial I see. Please, if you are going to

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have science-shorts at all scatter them around and use the editorial to tell about the magazine.

Are you sure it is wise to print Sam Moskowitz's articles? They are extremely good, of course, but they have a hex on them. Witness: *Satellite* printed his articles. *Satellite* flopped. *Fantastic Universe* did the same. But then . . . I hope you go on printing them anyway. They are worth the risk . . . but not in *Amazing*. You have a trust to uphold, there. May sf become the only field where the first magazine is still going . . . a connecting link with the past.

The Lovecraft short was great (what else) as was its illo. Ditto for Leiber's. Both description at its best.

As to the change from fantasy to sf, I say print anything good you can get and reject anything bad. If the story is fantastic at all that is the only decision you need to make as far as I'm concerned.

Please, serials.

Frederick Norwood
111 Upperline
Franklin, La.

● *Of course we do not play favorites in editing* Amazing *and* Fantastic. *Each magazine is special and completely individual. We make every effort to give you the best science fiction in* Amazing. *We select stories for* Fantastic *with the same high standard. The difference between the magazines is in content only. The fiction in* Fantastic *is more diversified; there is science fiction and there is also a variety of fantasy. But the selection of good and the rejection of bad material applies to both magazines.*

Dear Editor:

I picked up a copy of the June *Fantastic* in town here to kill a few hours. It has been a good many years since I read science fiction back in my college days, and I found most of the fiction pretty tame and low in the entertainment index, but I'm going to continue to buy the magazine as long as you continue this series on science fiction authors.

Let me congratulate you on including the fine biographical article on Olaf Stapledon. For years in college I used to try and write papers like this, but I could never include so much data and still make the article interesting reading.

Sam Moskowitz has managed to put in all the facts, dates, etc., and yet it still reads better than most of the fiction. He must have

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spent plenty of time and energy researching this and he seems really enthusiastic about his work.

Since I'll buy the magazine so long as the series continues, I'll also read the fiction. Who knows, I might find some good stories and go back to reading sf again!

John Lacey
Shrewsbury, Mass.

● *When it comes to interest, enthusiasm, background knowledge and limitless energy in the field of sf and fantasy, there is none better than Mr. Moskowitz. It's a lot of work, to be sure, but Sam is so devoted to the field that delving into the research becomes a labor of love. It's a series that we're proud to publish and knowing how much the readers are enjoying it is bright news for a guy named Sam Moskowitz.*

Dear Editor:

I bought the May issue of *Fantastic* because of the H. P. Lovecraft material and I was pleasantly surprised. The stories by Leiber, Bone and McIntosh were good reading. However, I think the prize of the issue was the article on Lovecraft by Sam Moskowitz. I wouldn't have thought it possible to come up with new angles on the man, but there was a lot here that I didn't know about.

In the June *Fantastic*, which I found disappointing from the fictional aspect, the stories being only fair reading, the article on Olaf Stapledon was marvelously done. It is so well written that it easily carries one along and the information about Stapledon was a revelation. These are the sort of articles I might expect to find in *F&SF* but it is completely unexpected to find them in *Fantastic*.

Hap Maurice
2460 Morningside Dr.
Mobile, Alabama

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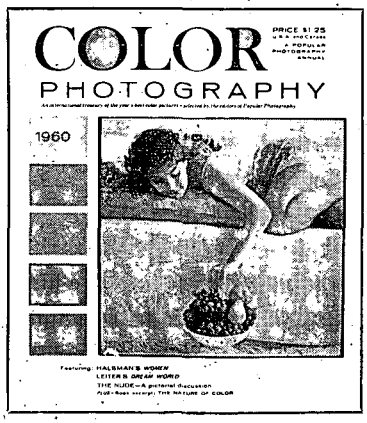

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